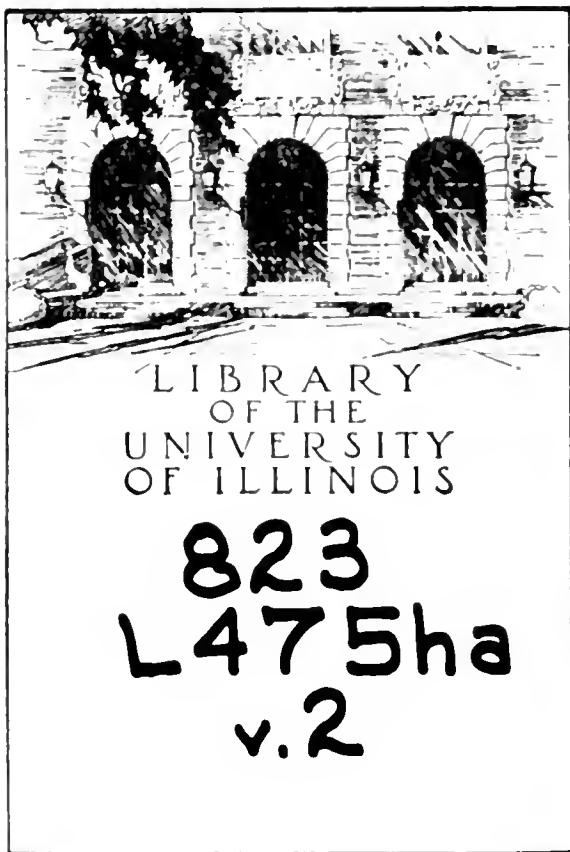


THE HAMPSTEAD MYSTERY

By
FLORENCE MARRYAT



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THE HAMPSTEAD MYSTERY.

VOL. II.

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The Hampstead Mystery.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF 'LOVE'S CONFLICT,' 'VÉRONIQUE,' 'MY OWN CHILD,' 'MY SISTER THE ACTRESS,' 'HOW LIKE A WOMAN,' 'PARSON JONES,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

L O N D O N :

F. V. W H I T E & C O.,
14 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1894.

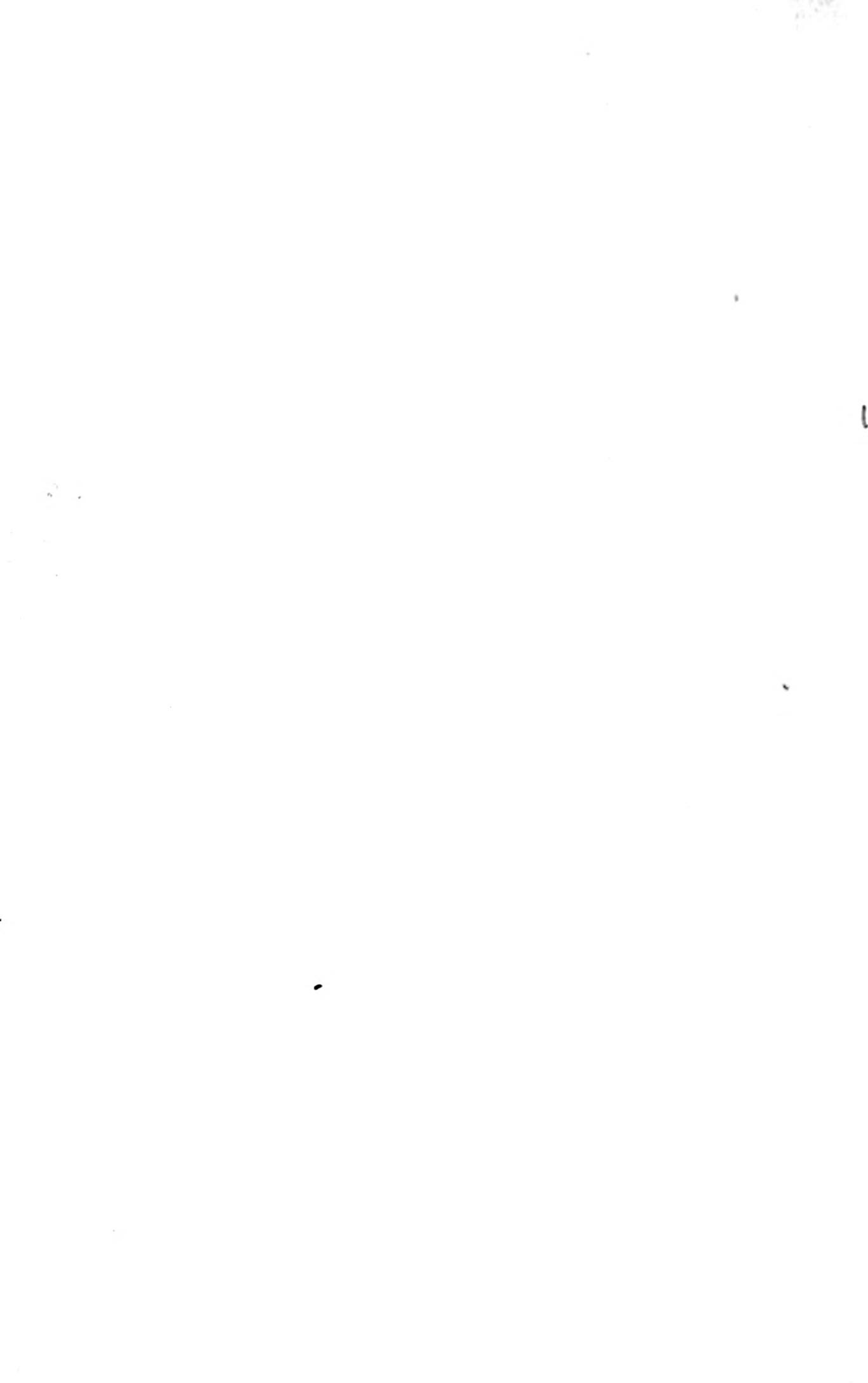
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THE HAMPSTEAD MYSTERY.



The Hampstead Mystery.

CHAPTER I.

IN a few seconds the door opened again, to admit Frederick Walcheren, leaning on the arm of his cousin, Philip. At first the jury wished the latter to withdraw, but he refused to do so.

‘Is it not sufficient,’ he cried, ‘for you to look at this unfortunate man, to see what he is suffering, and that he is incapable of confronting you alone? I refuse to leave him; if you insist upon it, we will both withdraw. This is a court of inquiry, not of justice; how dare you

treat this gentleman as if he were a criminal?’

‘I am not aware that the jury were doing so, Mr Walcheren,’ retorted Mr Procter. ‘However, as he seems ill, and you insist upon remaining by his side, let it be so. It is not, however, the usual thing for a witness to be examined in the presence of another person.’

‘I don’t care if it is the custom or not,’ replied Philip firmly. ‘You may commit me for contempt of court, if you like, but my cousin is too ill to stand by himself, and I refuse to leave him.’

‘Very well, sir, very well!’ replied the coroner tartly, ‘if Mr Frederick Walcheren answers the questions put to him, nothing more will be said about it.’

Frederick did indeed look more like a criminal than anything else. His dark hair, which he wore rather long for the general fashion, was dull and damp with the sweat which agony had forced from him. His features were pinched and his eyes sunk, whilst his clear olive complexion

had assumed a yellow, waxen hue. The whole man seemed to have collapsed under the force of his grief. He did not raise his eyes to the faces of his inquisitors, but sat leaning back in his chair, with his gaze fixed on the ground, and his hands clasped together between his knees.

‘Rouse yourself, if you please, sir,’ commenced the coroner, ‘and let us have as succinct an account as you can of all you know concerning this distressing affair. Do you recognise the deceased, Jane Emily Walcheren, as your late wife?’

‘Yes!’ answered Frederick in a low voice.

‘Speak up, if you please! The jury cannot hear your replies. When did you see the deceased lady last?’

‘On Saturday morning.’

‘Well, well, what more?’ cried Mr Procter, impatiently; ‘tell us all about it. Where did you see her, and when did you part with her, and what did you do in the interim? We want the whole story, and can’t go dragging it from you piecemeal?’

‘Say all you know, Frederick,’ whispered Philip, ‘it will be so much the sooner over and done with.’

The unhappy young man made a visible effort, and said,—

‘I saw her last alive on Saturday morning at the Castle Warden Hotel at about half-past eleven or twelve o’clock. We had just finished breakfast, and I left her to have a swim. I never saw her again until I came—here.’

‘How long were you away from the hotel?’

‘I did not return till nearly three. That hour was fixed for our luncheon.’

‘Three hours is a long time to be taking a swim. What were you doing for the rest of the time?’

‘I was occupied in the water, all, or nearly, all the time,’ replied Frederick.

But Mr Procter, who had never indulged in a bath but once in his life, and that was the day before his wedding, when he caught such a cold that he had never ventured into the water since, was not

to be taken in by so transparent an untruth.

‘In the water for three hours, sir! Do you expect the jury to believe that?’

‘I was in the sea for the best part of the time, swimming and doing feats of skill. Some part of it must be allowed for dressing and undressing myself. But the day was fine, and I did not care to come out sooner than was necessary.’

‘I believe I am right, Mr Walcheren, in saying that you were only married to the deceased on the Friday previous?’

‘That is the case.’

‘Is it usual for a bridegroom to leave his bride alone for three hours the day after their wedding in order that he may have a swim?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Frederick, wearily; ‘but I did.’

‘Well, when you came back at three o’clock you found your wife was gone?’

‘I did.’

‘Was it not rather strange, considering that you had gone to the beach, that she

did not go to the beach also, in order to find you ?'

'At first I thought she must have done so, but I searched the beach and the town, and, finally, the cliffs, without finding any trace of her.'

'And then you returned to the hotel ! At what time might that have been ?'

'I am not sure. At about five, or half-past, I think.'

'With the exception, then, of a run home for a few minutes, you were absent from the Castle Warden from half-past eleven to half-past five—six hours ? And all that time you were bathing or looking for your wife ?'

'I have already told you so,' answered Frederick.

'Who saw you during that time, Mr Walcheren ? What witnesses can you bring forward to testify that it was spent as you tell us ?'

'Witnesses !' reiterated Frederick, with a stare. 'How can I bring witnesses from a place where I am utterly unknown ? I

have never been in Dover to stay a night before now. Nobody in the town knows me. I have not spoken to an individual, excepting a young man who accosted me whilst swimming, and a girl whom I asked if she had seen—had seen—my—my—wife.'

'That is unfortunate,' remarked the coroner, drily. 'Now, Mr Walcheren, am I right in supposing that your marriage was not conducted very regularly—that it was undertaken, in fact, entirely against, and in opposition to, the wishes of the parents of the deceased?'

'I don't know what the devil business that is of yours!' exclaimed Frederick, roused from his lethargic condition by the impertinence of the question.

'Everything is my business, sir, in the pursuit of my duty, and, if you address me again in that manner, I shall commit you for contempt of court. I understand, further, that not only was your marriage with the deceased an irregular one, but that you took a false oath in order to procure a licence for it, by stating the de-

ceased to be of age, when she wanted a year of that time.'

'I did, if you will have it so!' said the young man, sullenly.

'Are you aware, Mr Walcheren, that in consequence of your behaviour in the matter, your father-in-law, Mr Crampton, altered his will and cut his daughter's name out of it?'

'Of course I knew it.'

'Who told you of it?'

'I forget. My wife, I suppose!'

'Mr Crampton never informed you of the fact himself?'

'Not that I remember.'

'You did not hear of it, in fact, until after your unfortunate marriage had taken place beyond recall. Can you deny it, sir?'

'I don't know if I did or did not. I cannot remember. My head is so dazed by the events that have taken place since that I cannot trust my memory in anything.'

'Perhaps I can jog it for you. You took a false oath in order to enable you to marry the deceased, whom you believed

to be an heiress, and it was not until you had brought her down here that you found out your mistake. Your wife told you of the fact, and you probably had a few words on the matter, before you left her so suddenly in the hotel.'

'It's a lie!' cried Frederick vehemently, as he sprang up from his chair, an action which caused the coroner to dodge behind two of the jury in case his witness might prove dangerous. 'It's a lie, I tell you, we never had a word of misunderstanding between us, and if you dare to mention her in that way to me again, I will knock your dirty head against the wall for you.'

He would have sprung at the coroner in reality, if his cousin had not restrained him.

'Frederick! Frederick! for *her* sake, restrain yourself. You would not mix up her name or memory with a low row.'

'Gentlemen of the jury!' exclaimed the coroner, 'another such insult on the part of that witness and I will put him in arrest for assault. You have heard him threaten me. The whole case is one of suspicion, in my

opinion. This man runs away with a lady under age, whom he believes to be an heiress, and the very day he finds out his mistake she is found thrown over the cliffs, under every appearance of there having been foul play. The witness would have us believe that he, a bridegroom not two days married, left his young wife for six mortal hours to indulge in swimming—that when she was missed, he made every effort to find her, that he even went along the cliffs where she lay dead, and never saw her body.'

'But the body lay *under* the cliffs,' interposed a juror; 'and the gentleman walked along them. He couldn't have found her unless he had descended to the beach.'

'That's right, Mr Colly,' said Procter, spitefully; 'always interrupt at the most important moments. The witness has eyes in his head. I suppose he could have looked over—if he had been very energetic in his search he *would* have looked over. And what was he doing all that time?

And is it likely the deceased would have ascended the cliffs by herself, in a place where she had never been before. You have heard the witness of the landlord and waiters of the hotel, to the effect that they never saw the deceased leave the hotel after her husband—that she must have been gone almost as long as he was, for another witness, Mr Hindes, called twice with the view of seeing her, and each time she was out. Now, where was she all that time, if she were not, as is most probable, with her husband? Dr M'Coll gave us his opinion that the deceased might have been thrown over the cliffs, or she might have fallen over, or she might have thrown herself over on purpose. Now, it seems to me highly improbable that a young woman of twenty should tumble over such a place by mistake—still less that she should have committed suicide the very day after her marriage; but words lead to quarrels, gentlemen, and quarrels lead to pushing sometimes, and a hasty push is a very dangerous thing, you know,

when near a steep cliff. I don't wish to bias your decision in this matter in any degree. If you find the deceased came by her death by misadventure you will give your verdict to that effect, but if you think the circumstances are such as to demand a stricter inquiry, you will say so. I leave the case in your hands now, and I feel sure you will do it justice !'

The jury shambled out of the room, and Frederick looked up into his cousin's face with open eyes that were half mystified and half alarmed.

' Philip ! what does that man mean ? He cannot—no ! it would be too gross—too impossible !—he cannot mean us to understand that he suspects me—*me* of having had any hand in this misfortune ?'

' Hush ! Fred ; hush !' replied Philip, laying his hand soothingly on the other's arm ; ' never mind what he says or thinks. He is a cad—any one can see that—in mind as well as breeding. Let the brute think what he likes. He cannot make others agree with him, and all your friends will

know that you are innocent in the matter as far as the poor girl's death is concerned.'

'But to be suspected, and by a creature like that—I, who would have given my worthless life for hers a thousand times over. My God! it is hard!'

Philip squeezed his hand.

'I know it! It is part of the trial, but it will soon be over now! Here are the jury! They have not been long in coming to a decision.'

'Well, gentlemen, and what is your verdict?' demanded Mr Procter, with an unctuous smack of his lips, as if he longed to hear them say they considered that there had been foul play in the matter.

'Our verdict, sir,' replied the spokesman; 'is that the deceased came by her death from a fall over the cliffs, but whether she was thrown over or fell over by accident there is not sufficient evidence to show!'

'It is unsatisfactory that your verdict should be undecided,' said the coroner; 'had you not better reconsider it?'

‘We are quite unanimous on the subject, sir ; and we would like to add a rider to the effect that some sort of fence should be put along the edge of the cliffs to prevent accidents in future.’

‘Very well, if you are agreed, it is no use detaining you any longer,’ said Procter, with an aggrieved air, for he had quite made up his own mind that Frederick Walcheren had killed his wife ; ‘you have only to sign the papers and end the proceedings.’

As soon as they were set at liberty, Philip hurried his cousin out of the room, for Frederick was in that reckless condition that he dreaded what he might say or do to the coroner. Here they found that the body of poor Jenny had already been moved to an upper chamber by the orders of Mr Crampton, and was being prepared by women’s hands for its last receptacle. That she should have been touched without his authority made her husband furious.

‘Who has dared to do this?’ he ex-

claimed wrathfully, as he glared at Mr Crampton and Henry Hindes.

‘*I* have dared, sir,’ replied the father, determinedly. ‘You stole my living daughter from me, but you shall not have her now that she is dead! I have ordered, or rather my kind friend Hindes here has ordered, every preparation to be made for the conveyance of her precious remains to Hampstead, where I shall take her by train to-morrow, and there our connection ends. You have done me all the injury in your power, and I never wish to see your face again, either in this world or the next.’

‘But you shall not have her, I say,’ cried Frederick in a fury, ‘she was my wife, and I defy you to take her from me, dead or alive! I shall take her myself to my brother’s place in Northampton and see her laid in the family vault of the Walcherens’. That is the only place where my wife shall lie.’

‘She was *not* your wife,’ exclaimed the old man; ‘you married her under false

pretences, and if you attempt to cross me in my purpose I will appeal to the law to see me righted, and give me back all that your villainy has left me of my child.'

'By Heaven you sha'n't!' said the younger man, as he made a rush forward as if he would have seized Mr Crampton by the throat; 'if you persist in your intention I will fight you inch by inch, old man as you are, for the possession of her remains.'

'Frederick!' interposed Philip, restraining him, 'think what you are saying and doing. Is such wrangling seemly in the very presence of the dead? You know what this gentleman says is the truth. You *did* rob him of his daughter, and by a fraud. In strictest justice, therefore, she belongs to him now, as she did whilst alive. But even were it not so, cannot you make up your mind to yield your wishes to his? Think of all he has lost, of how little he has remaining, and don't deny him this sad consolation of laying his daughter to rest where he can see her

grave. It is really of so little consequence when you come to think of it! And if it is a sacrifice on your part, cannot you make it as a little expiation for what has gone before, an atonement which Heaven may accept for the wrong you did them both. Be reasonable, Fred! After to-day neither you nor her father will ever see her in this world again. Why deny him the sorry comfort of taking her body home for her poor mother to weep over? Come, my dear fellow, yield this little point gracefully. I fancy your dear young wife, could we ask her, would rather choose to lie at Hampstead amongst the flowers than in our musty old vault at Northampton, where you never go.'

Frederick gave a tremendous gulp.

'Perhaps so,' he answered, 'perhaps so.' Then to Mr Crampton, 'Take her, sir, then, take my angel back to her own people, but let me bid her a last farewell before she is carried away from me.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Mr Crampton, shamed out of his brawling manner by the

other's submission, 'and I thank you for yielding the point, but I feel it is my right —the only right, unfortunately, which you have left me.'

Philip drew Frederick upstairs. He felt the less these two men met in the future the better. The room where Jenny now lay was already set to rights, and she was stretched upon the bed, clad in fair, fresh raiment, with her hands crossed meekly on her breast. She looked very different, poor child, from the saucy, merry, wilful girl who had run away with her lover, without giving a single thought to the consequences. The women had smoothed her hair upon her forehead, her eyes were sunk, her mouth pathetically closed and rigid. The little perfect nose, her lover had so much admired, was drawn and pinched almost out of all likeness to itself, and the inside of the hands were turning purple. Her unhappy husband prostrated himself with a cry of anguish by the side of the bed, and Philip withdrew and left him for a little while, whilst he made

arrangements for their departure for London. He felt that Frederick could have no possible desire to remain in Dover when Jenny's body had been removed thence, and that the sooner he left it the better.

Mr Crampton and Henry Hindes had decided to remain there till the following day, when the sad preparations for their return to Hampstead would be completed, and Philip Walcheren was glad to see them leave the 'Bottle and Spurs' for a hotel, where they had arranged to pass the night. He accompanied them to the town, and, when the coast was clear, he secured a close carriage and returned to the public-house for his unfortunate cousin.

'Come, dear Frederick,' he said, as he re-entered the room where the body lay; 'let me take you away from here. I have settled your bill at the Castle Warden, and your portmanteau is waiting us at the station. The—the other things there, I have arranged with Mr Crampton to take away. It is best that we should return to London at once.'

‘And is this the last—last time that I shall ever see her?’ asked Frederick, in a tone of unutterable woe.

‘On this earth, my dear cousin, yes,’ replied Philip, ‘and it is just as well. The sight can only increase your misery. In a very short time the undertakers will be here to do their work. Why not spare yourself the extra pain of watching them. And after they are gone, what will there be for you to gaze upon? A box of wood! Be a man, my dear fellow, and say good-bye to her.’

‘Oh! Philip, Philip, if you only knew what that word costs me. It is like dragging my very entrails out to pronounce it.’

‘I do know it, but it must be done. Better now than before strangers.’

‘Good-bye, good-bye, my angel,’ cried the young man, as he kissed the corpse from head to feet. ‘Don’t forget your wretched husband in the land you have gone to, but remember he has but one wish left on earth—to join you there. Good-bye, my only love! No other woman can

ever take your place with me. I dedicate the rest of my unhappy life to your sweet memory. Oh, Philip, how can I tear myself away from her !'

' You have forgotten to take this, Frederick,' said his cousin, drawing off poor Jenny's fatal wedding-ring and holding it out to him. ' It is yours by right to keep for her till you meet again.'

' Sacred and inviolate ! ' exclaimed Frederick, as he pressed the pledge of their married love to his lips. ' My God, hear me swear that this ring shall keep me faithful to my darling's memory for ever, that with it I pledge myself to fidelity and virtue as long as my life may last.'

' And God has heard the oath,' said Philip, solemnly. ' Come, Frederick, the carriage is waiting at the door. Do not prolong this trying scene any more.'

' Shall I see anybody ? ' asked his cousin in a fearful manner, as they gained the outside of the door at last ; ' shall we encounter either of those men again, Crampton or Hindes, I mean, or those

dreadful creatures who wanted to accuse me— My God, Philip,’ he continued, stopping short, ‘of what was it they wanted to accuse me?’

‘Of nothing, nothing, Frederick,’ replied Philip, soothingly, ‘you must not think of it again. It is the business of a jury to make everything look as black as possible, and they never think of the pain they may inflict by their unworthy suspicions. Try and forget it, with all the other incidents of this most trying day. You will meet no one, unless it be the people of the house. You may take my word for that! Just put yourself in my hands and I will manage everything for us both.’

Frederick was only too thankful to be relieved of all responsibility, for he was utterly worn-out with grief, and incapable of thinking or acting for himself, so he clung to the arm of his cousin, who hurried him into the carriage and off to the railway station before he hardly knew where they were going. But as they

neared London, he roused himself sufficiently to ask their destination.

‘I intend to take you to my house first,’ replied Philip, cheerfully, ‘for you are not fit in your present condition to look after yourself, nor would I allow you to go back alone to your flat in Nevern Mansions. In our house you shall have a couple of rooms to yourself, and Marion will take care that you are undisturbed. When you are better, you shall decide what to do. At present you must resign yourself into my hands.’

Frederick pressed his cousin’s hand and murmured ‘Thank you,’ without making the slightest objection to the plan.

He was, indeed, too intensely miserable and worn-out to care about anything, and when their journey came to an end, he allowed Philip to do with him exactly as he chose.

CHAPTER II.

A TELEGRAPHIC message, early in the day, had told Mrs Walcheren the time to expect them, and warned her to keep herself and the children out of the way, so that, when the travellers arrived in Kensington Gardens Square, they encountered no one but the servant who opened the door to them, and Frederick was conveyed to his apartments, without meeting another soul. Two rooms, adjoining one another, had been prepared for his reception, and, as he cast himself languidly upon a couch, he stretched out his hand to his cousin.

‘What you have done for me yesterday and to-day, Philip, I shall never forget, and can never repay. I think

you have saved my reason. God bless you for it!'

'To hear you say that, my dear Frederick, is more than sufficient to repay me for any trouble I may have taken on your behalf. But now, will you not try to take a little refreshment and rest? Have a warm bath! It is ready for you in the next room.'

'Yes! I should like to have a bath,' said Frederick, with a distorted smile; 'although that beast Procter did seem to imagine it was impossible that I should care to go into the water. Water is about the only luxury I could never dispense with. And I feel so dirty,' with a heavy sigh.

'All right, then, go at once,' replied his cousin; 'everything is prepared for you, and don't be afraid of meeting anybody. You are as much alone on this floor as if you were in your own flat. No one will come near you unless you ring, and for to-night I shall wait on you myself.'

‘How good you are to me!’ said Frederick, as he went into the bath-room.

When he came out again, with the taint of death, as it were, washed off him, he found a tray awaiting him, with a basin of strong soup, and a decanter of sherry, and Philip insisted upon his taking some refreshment before he dressed himself anew. His portmanteau had been unstrapped, and a fresh suit of grey tweed laid out for him to put on, but, unfortunately, it was the one which he had worn on Saturday morning, and the sight of it made him break down weakly again, as people will after having sustained a prolonged nervous strain.

‘My darling! my darling!’ he sobbed, ‘how little I thought, when I left you on that fatal morning, that I should never see you again, except—except—’

‘Come, Frederick, take your soup and drink a glass of sherry. You needn’t be afraid of two or three glasses, for it is the oldest in my cellar, and you know I am

rather a connoisseur in wine. Never mind dressing yourself again; there is no occasion. Your dressing-gown will be far more suitable, and then you can lie down comfortably on the sofa. You must be sadly in want of rest.'

'Yes, I do feel rather tired,' replied Frederick, as he drank several glasses of the generous wine, and lay down as his cousin directed him; 'and I almost think that I could sleep a little. I suppose one does go on sleeping and eating as long as one lives, even if one *has* lost everything one cared for in the world,' he added, with a wintry smile.

'Well, then I will leave you for a little while, and see my wife and children,' said Philip, taking no notice of his remark. 'Try and compose yourself. Rest will do you more good than anything else; and I will be with you again in an hour, sooner if you care to have me, and will ring your bell.'

'No, no! go to Marion,' said Frederick, in a drowsy voice. 'I have been trouble

enough to you already.' And Philip, seeing that he was really inclined to rest, left him to himself.

Of course his wife had much to hear, and he to tell, of the unhappy scenes he had passed through, and an hour slipped away before he went up to his cousin's room again. He opened the door softly and peeped in. Frederick was still lying on the couch in an attitude of extreme exhaustion. He was breathing heavily, and catching his breath in his sleep, sobbingly, as children do; whilst, ever and anon, a half-muttered word, showed how grief pursued him, even in his dreams. Philip watched him for a few moments and then withdrew, and left him to his slumbers. Heavy, as he knew the awakening must be; Frederick needed strength above all other things, in order to bear what lay before him. Physically he had never been a very strong man, and his dissipated life had further tended to undermine his constitution, so that his cousin had feared for the effect of so violent a

grief upon his health. When he descended to his family again he found the party augmented by the arrival of Father Tasker, who had come to hear what news Marion had received from Dover. Philip welcomed him warmly.

‘You have come in the very nick of time,’ he exclaimed. ‘But I felt your good angel would direct your footsteps hither. Frederick is far more resigned than I hoped to see him, but then, he is so exhausted at the present moment that one can hardly judge. I left him asleep on the sofa in his room. It is the first time he has closed his eyes since this terrible calamity overtook him—’

‘Say, rather, my son, since this great blessing was vouchsafed him, for I fully believe that this visitation, dreadful as it appears at first sight, is simply the voice of God calling to His unhappy child to repent and be saved.’

‘I believe you are right, father,’ said Philip. ‘For his sorrow has already made a great change in Frederick. He swore

before me, on his dead wife's wedding-ring, to pledge himself to virtue and fidelity for the rest of his life. I am sure he regards her death as a species of punishment for his former sins.'

' May he continue to do so,' replied the priest. ' But such feelings are but too often evanescent. If we are to take advantage of this softening on his part, Philip, it must be while his memory is still fresh—his feelings yet lacerated. We must strike whilst the iron is hot, or with time and forgetfulness his heart may harden, as did the heart of Pharoah, and this salutary lesson be lost.'

' I do not think his sorrow for her loss will soon pass, father. I never remember to have seen Frederick so prostrated with grief before. I believe this poor girl must have been, as he says, the one love of his life.'

' To the exclusion of the Church and his religious duties, my son. Yes, perhaps so, but those are the very loves that the Lord is jealous of—that He will not

permit, and so cuts off, in order that we
me may find our joy in Him alone.'

'Stay to dinner with us, father,' said Philip eagerly. 'Poor Frederick may be glad to see you, later on, and you can direct his thoughts to these great truths. Marion, my dear, the father will stay with us, I know. Let the servants know that he will do so.'

Philip peeped once more into his cousin's apartments before he descended to the dining-room, only to find him still sleeping, though brokenly, and it was not until dinner was concluded, that he ventured upstairs again. But then his worst fears were realised. Frederick had woken up with strength renewed by his temporary relief, to the full horror of his bereaved position. His cousin found him prostrated on the couch in an agony of suffering, during which he was calling upon the Almighty to put an end to his existence, or to give him back that of which He had so cruelly robbed him.

‘Frederick! this is blasphemy!’ cried Philip in a tone of horror, ‘God’s will is not to be altered by man’s ravings. Your wife is in His keeping. Has that thought no power to calm your transports? Would you have her back again, even if you could, in this world of pain and disappointment?’

‘Yes, I would, I would!’ returned the young man, a thousand times over. Do you suppose that my darling can enjoy even heaven without me, whom she loved so tenderly? No, no! She is weeping for me, as I weep for her. You told me yourself that you did not believe that she was happy. Oh, my love—my love, would God I might have died for you, or with you.’

‘Frederick, Father Tasker is below. Would you like him to come up and speak to you? He can make the reason of such things clearer to you than I can.’

‘Father Tasker!’ exclaimed Frederick, ‘No. He will only talk to me of submission and obedience to God’s will, and make me more miserable. I *can’t* submit; it’s no use telling me to do so, and I can’t see

God's love in the matter, either. I can only see hard-heartedness and cruelty, and utter indifference to my trouble. I have only one wish left—to die too, and join my darling, wherever she may be!'

'If you were sure of joining her, certainly that would be the easiest plan out of it all. But, Frederick, Father Tasker will tell you the best way—the only way—by which you can hope to join your wife when your time comes. Believe me, he has no intention or desire to wound you by any allusion to your trouble, unless you desire it. He has come to see you only as a friend who deeply sympathises with your pain.'

'Let him come up, then,' replied Frederick in a muffled voice, and in another minute the priest entered the room, whilst Philip discreetly remained downstairs. Father Tasker went up to the couch where the stricken man still lay, and kindly laid his hand on his.

'God bless you, my son, and comfort you,' he said.

‘How can God comfort me?’ demanded Frederick. ‘He will not give me my lost wife back again.’

‘Not in this world; but is this world all we live for? At the best we are here but for a few short years, whilst the next will last for all eternity. Had you the choice of fifty years spent with your late wife, Frederick, or fifty thousand, which would you prefer?’

‘How can you ask me, when you know she was the life of my life! Father, you have heard so much of my loose style of living, that you may think my love for her was like the rest, but it was no more to be compared to them than light to darkness. I loved her—I loved her—all the other feelings I have ever experienced for women look like horrible nightmare dreams, or flimsy shadows, beside the strong, deep passion she evoked in me. I should have become a better man for her sake. Perhaps even religious, like Philip,—who knows? The possession of her—the knowledge of her love for me—

made me feel so grateful, that I might have ended by loving God in very gratitude for what He had given me in her. And now—now, it is all over.'

'It is not all over, my son. It has but just begun.'

Frederick raised his swollen features to gaze with astonishment in the priest's face.

'I mean what I say! Love cannot die! Your wife is gone from your mortal gaze, but she still exists and her love exists with her. And now is the time for you to show the world if you did love her or not. I am not questioning your passion for her earthly body. I understand she was very beautiful, and such things take a great hold on men's fancies. But her body is no longer here for you to lavish your affection upon. What are you going to do for her soul?'

'Were I a good man, I would pray for it; but who would hear the prayers of such a sinner as I am? Besides, my darling was infinitely purer and better

than myself! She can have no need of my prayers.'

'That is to say, then, that she was not mortal, for all mortals have need of each other's help. Besides, if she had no need of your prayers, have you none of your own?'

'Ah! father, you touch me on the raw there. I have felt, even since I comprehended what the awful news they brought me meant, as if it were a judgment upon me for my sins—as if the Lord had taken my innocent darling in His exceeding wrath at my past wickedness.'

'In His love, not His wrath,' interposed the priest gently; but Frederick did not heed him.

'Ever since I lost her,' he went on, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, 'I have done nothing but think of Rhoda Berry, and that girl down at Southampton, and other certain black marks on my unhappy life. But is God so hard as that? Can He have stricken down my angel by so cruel a death, just as she was happy with

me, because I have made a beast of myself. Why her, and not me? I was the sinner. I should have been the sufferer.'

'And you are suffering greatly, my son; but it is a suffering which may result in exceeding joy. Why did the Almighty not take you, instead of your wife—the girl whom you led to fly in the face of her parents and to err greatly on that account. I think I can tell you. He was too gracious to cut you off in the midst of your sins, without giving you a chance of reparation, and, by taking her instead, he has left you behind to pray for the salvation of her soul. Frederick, that poor child is even now holding out her pale hands to you, through the gates of purgatory, and saying, "Husband! it was you who led me astray; it is to you I look to release me from these purgatorial fires. Show your great love for me, by dedicating the rest of your life to this pious purpose, so that, when I have risen, I may join my prayers to yours, and requite your goodness by praying for you." This poor girl was not of our faith; she was

a heretic, so much the more does it behove all those who loved her to entreat the Blessed Mother of God to use her interest with her Son in order to gain her salvation. If you love her, Frederick, as you say you do, now is the time to prove it. Come back to the Church you have deserted, and spend your future life so as you may meet your wife again, when your time comes to leave this world.'

' You mean,' said Frederick, ' that I shall give up my fortune to the Church, as my godfather intended I should do. Well, if you will use it in masses for the repose of my poor darling's soul, you may have it. It is worth nothing to me now. My life, to all intents and purposes, is over.'

' I do not mean only that,' replied the priest; ' I do not think that the Church would accept your money without yourself. But you must not forget, Frederick, what was your sainted mother's wish and aim. She designed you, her favourite son, for the service of the Church—she educated you for that purpose, but, as soon as you

were left without her counsel and guidance, you abandoned your studies and elected to go your own way. But the Church has never given you up. She considers you still as her child and disciple, and is ready at any time to welcome you back into her ranks. A very few more months of study would fit you to pass the necessary examination for ordination as a priest. Is it no inducement to you to know that, in that capacity, you might offer the Mass, every time you celebrated it, for the repose of your wife's soul—that you would live, as it were, in the presence of God, pleading for her, and for your eternal re-union? If you really desire her everlasting salvation—if you long to meet her again, and in a state of bliss—if you regret your past life and desire to lead a purer one in the future, you will take it up where you dropped it at your mother's death, and fit yourself for eternity.'

'I *do* wish all that you say,' cried Frederick, whose body was sorely weakened, and whose mental calibre had never

been too strong (for his love of vicious courses in the past, proved the weakness of his moral character). ‘ I care nothing more for money, or the pleasures that money bring, and I have but one desire—to be assured of my darling’s happiness, and that we shall meet again hereafter. Oh ! father, if these things are to be gained by my entering the Church, let me do so as quickly as I may, for if you do not find me occupation and distraction, I shall go mad.’

‘ The Holy Church will take care of you, my son,’ said Father Tasker, as he rose to leave the room. ‘ She will envelop you with her arms like a loving mother, and soothe all your sorrows and your fears to rest upon her holy breast. And the Blessed Mother of God, who is weeping tear for tear with you every moment, will rejoice so exceedingly to regain her lost child, that she will do her utmost to reward you by the salvation of your wife, whom she will accept as her child too, because of her great love for you. You could not have chosen a truer means to ensure the happy-

ness of both. You will live, my son, to call this sad time the most blessed of all your life.'

'But, meantime, I must live without *her*!' cried Frederick, relapsing into a storm of grief.

'Not without her,' replied the priest, 'but with her, in spirit, every hour. This is where our blessed faith comforts us exceedingly over those of less favoured people. They *talk* of the Communion of Saints, but *act* as though the dead, once removed from our sight, had no more part nor lot with mortal flesh. But we know that this doctrine is erroneous, else what would become of our many instances of saints and angels appearing to men after their demise? The dead, so-called, are not beyond the reach of our prayers and our tears. They hear us and see us and pray for us. And it is our blessed privilege to ask their prayers, as in the case of your sainted mother (who has, doubtless, wearied the throne of God with her entreaties on your behalf—now about

to be so mercifully and almost miraculously answered); or to give them ours, as in the case of your young wife, who will, in after years, rise up and call you blessed for what you have done for her, as you have cause to call your dear mother.'

'I am hers and the Church's for evermore,' exclaimed Frederick, in a fervour of exaltation, as he stretched forth his hands and clasped those of the father; 'only tell me what to do and I will do it!'

'Take a day or two to think over the idea, my son, and then, if you are still of the same mind, I will speak to my old friend, Canon Bulfil, on the subject, and see if he cannot receive you into his college, until you are ready to pass for Holy Orders. I am persuaded that a few months' study is all you will require to regain what you may have lost.'

'And then—and then,' exclaimed Frederick, with raised eyes and clasped hands, 'I shall offer the blessed Mass for the repose of her soul every day, five and six

times a day, if they will let me do so. I shall tell them that they cannot give me too much work. If it kills me, so much the better. It will send me all the sooner to her.'

He remained in this mingled state of despair and hope for many days to come, and it was whilst in this condition that Philip Walcheren and the priest took advantage of him, and persuaded him to give himself and his fortune to the Church. Not that they entertained the slightest idea of fraud or chicanery in doing so. On the contrary, they honestly rejoiced in their success, believing that they were securing the salvation of his soul, and the commendation of their superiors in the faith. They were both good men in their way, and earnest to promote the cause of the Catholic Church and their religion.

We judge our fellow creatures too hardly in this world, on the supposition that what is good for Tom and Dick, must, necessarily, be good for Harry. A Protestant can see nothing but idolatry in

the worship paid by a Catholic to the image of his patron, but he is quite blind to the fact that, when he exclaims with horror if one stands on a ginger-bread covered bible in order to increase one's stature, he practises the same idolatry in another form. The Catholic regards the Protestant as a heretic, because he does not bow his head at the elevation of the Mass ; but when the Catholic Church forbids her children to kneel in prayer with their Protestant brethren, she is as openly contemptuous of their faith as she believes them to be of hers. Such extremes are folly, and go far to make one disbelieve in the uses of religion at all, except as a plea for fighting. Intolerance has caused more people to forsake the ordinances of their childhood than anything else, and those who set the faction going and the flame alight, will have much to answer for, if the day of judgment, which they foretell, ever comes to pass.

Both Catholics and Protestants may do many things which appear intolerant to

outsiders, and yet act in the most perfect faith and desire to serve God. This was how Philip Walcheren and Father Tasker acted with regard to Frederick. They wanted to help him save his soul—they thought they saw a way of doing it—and they brought all their arguments to bear upon that way.

And Frederick was as tinder in their hands. His whole mind was absorbed with the idea that his sins had, in a measure, brought this awful calamity upon him, and that the loss of Jenny was due to himself alone. He loathed the thought of his past life with its licentiousness and folly. He wanted to put it right out of his head—to forget it had ever been—to lose sight of anything that should remind him of it. The idea of a cloister and hard study, strange to say, held no horror, at that moment, for this man of the world, who had lived his life on race-courses, and behind the scenes of theatres. All he longed for was oblivion, and he hoped to find it

in the exercise of religion. Have we not all felt so at times, when the hopes of earth were shattered at our feet, and we could turn nowhere in the world for comfort? It is then, and especially when death has removed what we loved best from our sight, that we feel as if we must *make* the heaven for ourselves, in which we only half believe.

That is well enough. It is the cry of the human heart for the love of God, without which it cannot exist. If it could be followed by a realisation of the presence of God, the soul would be satisfied and all life changed. The burdens of earth would roll off our shoulders as Christian's bundle rolled off his back in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and, instead of despairing mortals, reviling our fate and the Almighty's ordinances, we should be contented, grateful children, waiting patiently till our Father saw fit to call us home!

But the mistake is, to suppose that religious ceremonies, designed of men,

will heal our wounds, unless God's balm has dropped upon them first. Church-going is all very well for those who like it, but it should never be made a superstition, as so many people make it, since it was only instituted to do honour to God (which mission it too often sadly fails in), and God is everywhere ready to be done honour to.

Yet we are too apt to fly to it in our sorrow, and believe, as Frederick Walcheren believed, that, by making a great sacrifice of all his pleasures, and making a great sweep of all his sins at one and the same time, he would be pleasing God and securing his own happiness.

CHAPTER III.

OF all the people who suffered, and were destined to suffer, from Jenny Walcheren's death, the heart that bled the most has been mentioned the least, because it bled so silently and unobtrusively. Poor Mrs Crampton! Who can estimate the depth and length and breadth of a mother's love?

Whilst Mr Crampton had been noisily giving way to his indignation and suspicions down at Dover, and Frederick Walcheren had been lapped in despair, and Henry Hindes had been compelled to hide his dastardly dread under an assumption of friendly concern, she had been bowed beneath the weight of her sorrow at home. It was so hard to

believe it. Her Jenny!—whom she had never parted from since she was a little baby at her breast. She sat passive, silent and incredulous, in her darkened room, trying to realise that Jenny would never come home again, except in her coffin. Her husband had wired her to say that he and Mr Hindes would return on the Tuesday evening, bringing *that* with him, which was all that was left of their daughter. The poor, stricken mother could not believe it. She tried to make herself do so. She kept on talking to Aunt Clem about Jenny, of her childhood, her wilfulness, and her beauty, but still the tears would not come, and the poor heart was unrelieved.

‘I wish I could cry, Clem,’ she said pathetically, ‘I wish I could cry; but, whenever I think it is coming, a great, hard lump seems to rise in my throat and drive it back again. I fancy I should feel better in my head if I could cry. Talk to me, Clem, of when she was a little girl.’

‘She was a sweet little girl,’ said poor Aunt Clem, mendaciously, ‘a little fond of her own way, perhaps, but very loving and obedient.’

‘Oh! no, Clem, not obedient, I think,’ replied Mrs Crampton, ‘but always loving. I remember, when she was a baby, how I used to look at her and wonder if she would ever grow up to be a woman. I had lost so many of them, you see, Clem—five darlings buried, one after another—until I was quite afraid to grow fond of a baby for fear it should be taken from me. I can never forget those burials. They used to tear my heart in two, and bury a piece of it every time. I went to see the two first buried,—those were little John and Edmund, you know, Clem; but, afterwards, I couldn’t bear the sight. It seemed so hopeless my having any children, until my Jenny came, so different from all the others, who had been sickly little creatures; but she was so fat and bonny that the doctor said to me, “Well, you’ve got a thriving child this

time, Mrs Crampton.' And yet it was many years, Clem, before I dared to spend my whole love on her. I felt as if she were to go too—that I must die. And yet you see she has gone, and I can sit and talk about it to you, and do not even cry. It is very strange; I am afraid there must be something wrong with my head,' and she passed her hand in a puzzled manner over her forehead as she spoke.

'Oh! my dear sister,' exclaimed Aunt Clem, whose own features were almost indistinguishable from the effect of her tears, 'do try and cry. I am sure it would do you good.'

'It has not done you any good, Clem,' replied the poor mother. 'Besides, we may expect her home at any moment now, and John has never been very patient of my tears. I should not like to meet them—I mean him—with my eyelids swollen. It might upset him. For we must be very quiet over it, you know, Clem. It is a very solemn occasion. Is everything ready for her reception?'

‘Yes, dear ; I have arranged they shall carry her into your boudoir. It will make the room more dear to you afterwards, Ellen. Bradshaw helped me to remove the ornaments and drape the tables in white, and decorate the room with flowers. I think you will like it when you see it, dear. At least, I have done my best.’

‘I remember,’ said the mother, in a monotone, ‘how averse I was to call her Jane. John would have it so, because his sister Jane had only died a month before her birth, but I thought it such a plain name. I had set my heart upon calling her Ethel, after the heroine in Thackeray’s story of the Newcomes, but her father said it was romantic nonsense on my part, and he would have her nothing but plain “Jane.” But Mrs Sellon stood godmother to her, so she was called Emily, also, after her. Ah, well,’ with a heavy, deep-drawn out sigh, ‘it doesn’t signify now, does it?’

‘Hark !’ exclaimed Miss Bostock, changing colour, as the sound of carriage wheels

was heard slowly advancing up the drive.
‘What is that?’

Mrs Crampton rose, trembling. They both knew but too well. It was the funeral coaches which they heard, coming back from the station where they had been ordered to await the nine o’clock train.

‘Let me go!’ cried Mrs Crampton wildly, rousing herself from her apparent apathy for the first time, ‘let me go to my child, my Jenny. I must be there to meet her.’

But Miss Bostock held her back.

‘Dear, dear Ellen,’ she said, ‘pray don’t go down stairs till John has come to fetch you; there is so much to be done yet. Stay here quietly, there’s a dear, till the arrangements are complete. Bradshaw promised to meet John and tell him where they were to carry her. Don’t make a scene in the hall. You know how he objects to any publicity.’

‘A scene in the hall, Clem,’ said Mrs Crampton, in a voice of surprise. ‘And when I am going to meet my own child

and welcome her home? I don't understand you! Let me see, though. Isn't she married? Didn't she marry that Mr Walcheren, or is it a mistake? It must be a mistake, Clem, or why should she come back to us? My pretty Jenny, the beauty of Hampstead, as they call her! How glad I shall be to have her home again.'

'Good God!' cried Miss Bostock, in an agony of terror, 'her brain is going. John, John!' she called out over the banisters, 'come here quick to Ellen, she is very ill!'

The mournful *cortège* had, by this time, entered the house, and deposited their burden on the white-draped table in the boudoir on the ground floor. The coffin had been temporarily closed, but the undertakers, who had met it at the station, unclosed it again, and Jenny Walcheren lay revealed, placid and immovable, under her father's roof. Mr Crampton, hearing his sister-in-law's appeal, and thinking his wife had fainted, ran upstairs at once, but was surprised to meet her on the landing

with a strange look in her eyes, but an unmoved countenance, as she extended her hand to him.

‘John!’ she said, in a muffled voice, ‘our Jenny has come home. I heard her enter the house. Take me down to see her without delay.’

‘Oh, John!’ whispered the terrified Aunt Clem, ‘it will kill her. Ought she to see her? I believe she is going out of her mind with grief.’

‘Poor soul! and well she may,’ replied Mr Crampton, as he looked into his wife’s staring eyes. ‘But let her come; the sight can’t make her worse than she is. Come, Ellen,’ he added, affectionately, ‘come and see your lamb, then. God has taken her from us, Nelly, but there is no help for it, and railing won’t bring her back again. Come and see how peacefully she sleeps.’

He led the bereaved mother downstairs and into the boudoir as he spoke. The servants, who had been gazing tearfully on the remains of their young mistress, with-

drew respectfully, as they saw the approach of their employers; and, as they entered the room, Mr Crampton closed the door behind them. The most expensive coffins that Dover could produce had been procured to convey poor Jenny's remains to Hampstead, and there she lay in a white satin-lined shell, enclosed in a polished oak sarcophagus, heavily clamped and ornamented with brass. Mrs Crampton had had her Jenny before her mental eyes all day, dead indeed, but plump and filled-out as when she had parted with her. She was prepared to see a corpse, but a corpse that was only a marble likeness of her child, and when her husband reverently and solemnly lifted the cambric cloth that hid the features of the deceased, and she perceived a little, shrunken and fallen-in body with a pallid face, looking half the size it used to be, and flattened hands with purple nails and palms, she drew one gasping breath, and gave a scream that echoed and re-echoed through the mansion.

‘*That* my Jenny?’ she exclaimed; ‘*that*

my child—my daughter? Oh, God! be merciful, be merciful!' and dropped upon the floor in a dead faint.

Miss Bostock, who was sobbing at the sad sight before her as if her heart would break, flung herself down in terror beside her prostrate sister.

'John, John,' she cried, 'it has killed her. I told you it would.'

'Don't say that, Clem,' exclaimed the unhappy man, 'for, if I lose her as well, I shall have nothing left to live for. Go and send William for Dr Sewell at once.'

'Where is Mr Hindes?' said Miss Bostock. 'Did he not travel with you?'

'Yes, but he would not enter the Cedars. There was no need, and he feared to intrude on our sorrow at this sad home-coming. But he did everything for me whilst at Dover, and worked night and day in my behalf to save me trouble. I can never repay him for all his goodness. But send for Sewell, Clem, and tell Bradshaw to come here and help me carry poor Nelly to her room. She

must not come back to her senses here.'

Mrs Bradshaw, who was the house-keeper, appearing at that moment, they lifted the poor mother between them and conveyed her upstairs, and, when she came to herself again and remembered what had occurred, a violent burst of weeping relieved her overcharged brain and rendered her grief more natural, and, consequently, less acute.

The sad days which succeeded, until that of the funeral arrived, were spent in silence and gloom, in a darkened house, where meals were prepared as usual, but never touched, and even the domestics spoke with bated breath, and went about their work with red-rimmed eyes. The preparations for the interment went on, and were conducted without the slightest regard to expenditure. Mr Crampton felt a melancholy pleasure in determining that it should be the most magnificent funeral that had ever taken place in Hampstead, and be succeeded by the most magnificent

monument that had ever been erected over so young and insignificant a girl. He would have an inscription on it, he said to himself, that should hand down her cruel story to posterity, and be a standing shame against Frederick Walcheren for ever more. And all Hampstead sympathised in his ambition. If Jenny had not been an universal favourite during her lifetime, she became so upon her death. The girls who had been jealous of her unusual beauty, and the admiration which it excited, were shocked at her sudden removal from amongst them, and the young men were as deeply moved. Everyone sympathised with the unfortunate parents who had lost the hope of their old age, and, when the day of the funeral arrived, there was hardly a household in Hampstead who did not send a wreath of flowers to place upon the bier, and a representative to swell the crowd about the grave.

Mr Crampton's city friends, too, turned out in large numbers to pay their last token of respect to his daughter, so that the line

of carriages seemed unlimited, and the cemetery was filled with spectators. Mr Crampton had purchased a large plot of ground in the principal avenue, with the intention of making a garden round the grave, and here assembled, on that beautiful August afternoon, old and young, rich and poor, friends and strangers, to see his lovely daughter laid to rest in the warm bosom of her Mother Earth—all but the man who, humanly speaking, had caused all the trouble, but who was about to expiate it by a sacrifice greater than anyone else would have thought of dedicating to Jenny's memory.

Amongst the chief mourners, and standing next to old Mr Crampton, was Henry Hindes, clad in a suit of the deepest black, and with a face the colour of ashes. The bystanders, even those least well acquainted with the principal performers in the tragedy, remarked that he seemed to suffer as much, if not more, than the father did.

‘He did not weep so openly, as poor

Mr Crampton,' said a woman who had stood near him, 'but he shook so violently that I could see him do it. And, when the clergyman came to the part of "Dust to dust, and ashes to ashes," Mr Hindes swayed as if he was going to fall into the grave. I was quite frightened. I thought every moment that he would faint.'

'Ah! well,' replied her companion, 'he is one of the firm, you see, and a great friend of the family; I daresay he has known the poor girl ever since she was born! I wonder who the Cramptons will leave their money to now! Some one told me that this is the last of their family, and the sixth child they have lost, and they have no heir left. It'll be a nice pot of money for whoever gets it! They are reported to be as rich as Croesus.

Mr Crampton said something of the same thing to Henry Hindes that evening, as they sat together in the library at The Cedars. The old man had in-

sisted upon his friend accompanying him home, and the latter had not known how to refuse with any grace.

‘Why I want to speak to you, my dear Hindes, is this,’ said Mr Crampton as they sat in the gloaming together. ‘You see it behoves me now to make a new will! Everything I had was to have gone to my poor girl—that is, after her mother’s death—but that’s all over now; in fact, everything is over for me, and I don’t fancy I shall last long myself.’

‘You mustn’t say that, my dear friend,’ replied Hindes, in the strange, muffled voice he had adopted of late, and which he attributed to a bad sore throat, ‘you are hale and hearty, and have many years of life, I hope, before you yet, and—when this—this terrible event has somewhat faded from your memory—of enjoyment also.’

‘No, Hindes, no! I am too old a man to forget so easily. You see it is not as if it were the first nor the

second, and it has given me my death-blow, I am certain of that. We men don't make so much noise about our troubles as the women do, poor things; not that they don't feel as keenly, perhaps, but their tears are their salvation. Now people, to have heard me talk over this business, might have thought, maybe, that all I cared for was my revenge on the scoundrel who stole my pretty one from me. But it isn't so—only the other feeling lies too deep for words. But, I am sure of one thing—and that is, that my wife there will outlive me, and that it won't be so long, either, before she's a widow. Now, of course, she'll be provided for amply, and her sister into the bargain; but two women of such quiet tastes and habits can never use one half of the money I have to leave behind me; and who are they to leave it to, when they die? They stand alone in the world. Of course I had meant—I had intended—to leave my Jenny more than half of it

—that's what I've been working for all these years—but as it is—'

Here the old man stopped, and, leaning his head on his hand, pressed the burning eyeballs which refused to shed tears, but let his dry heart feed upon itself.

'My dear friend,' interposed Hindes, 'do not pursue this torturing subject to-night, I entreat you. Think of the trial you have already gone through, and have some pity on yourself.'

'No, Hindes, I wish to say what I have to say to-night, and I am quite equal to it. I must see Throgmorton, my solicitor, about my will to-morrow, without fail, for the next day I intend taking my wife and her sister to Scotland for a change. But I will be as brief as I can. I mean, therefore, to alter my will with respect to the names, but not to disposition of property. To my wife and her sister, I shall leave, for their lifetimes, the half of my fortune, and the other half—my poor Jenny's share—to you.'

‘To *me*,’ exclaimed Henry Hindes, starting from his chair. ‘No, no, it is impossible. The very idea is horrible to me. I will not take it.’

Mr Crampton gazed at this sudden eruption in mute surprise.

‘But why not you, my dear Hindes?’ he said, after a pause. ‘You are the best—I may say—the nearest and dearest friend I possess; and now that *she’s* gone, your children are the only ones in whom I feel any interest. I can never thank nor repay you for all you have done for me during this sad time. I do not mean to offer you my fortune as a requital, only to show you how deeply I have felt your goodness to me, and how truly I value your friendship and the love you felt for my poor girl.’

‘I cannot take it—it is impossible,’ gasped Hindes, as he nervously swept his brow, over and over again, with his handkerchief.

‘I know you are rich enough for every ordinary purpose, my dear fellow, but

wealth is never unwelcome. Even with our combined fortunes, you will not be a Rothschild. And, even if you were, you have three children to spend it on, and may have more. If you absolutely refuse to be my heir, I will make little Walter so. You will not refuse to let me benefit your child, to pass on to him that which was intended for my own.'

'I would rather not indeed!' repeated Hindes. 'Walter will have plenty. The idea of his being your heir is painful to me. Surely there are members amongst your own or your wife's family who would be thankful to be remembered by you, and need your kindness more than my children do.'

Mr Crampton looked puzzled and a little vexed. He had wished to show his appreciation of the Hindes's affection for his dead daughter, and his partner's determined refusal of his offer wounded him. It is not pleasant to have an intended kindness thrown back in one's face. But all he said was,—

‘ You have disappointed me ! ’

‘ I am sorry,’ said Hindes, spasmodically, ‘ but it took me by surprise. It is more than I deserve at your hands—I feel as if I had no right to accept your bounty. People might think it strange—they might begin to question—’

‘ What could they question? What right would they have to think it strange? ’ demanded Mr Crampton, querulously. ‘ Have I not a right to dispose of my money in my own way? Come, Hindes, if it is not to be you, it must be your son, so I give you fair warning, and you can divide your own money amongst your children as you choose. But little Walter will be my heir—will take the place of my poor murdered Jenny, whether you like it or no. I will give Throgmorton the necessary directions to-morrow.’

‘ My God, my God! ’ groaned Hindes, below his breath.

‘ My poor friend, I know you are feeling this trouble almost as much as myself,’ continued Mr Crampton, ‘ that is what has en-

deared you so to me since it occurred. I wonder what that fellow Walcheren, who has been the cause of it all, is thinking of at the present moment. If he has a conscience, by Jove! I don't envy him the possession of it. Say what you will, Hindes, I shall always look upon him as her murderer. If he didn't push her over the cliff, which I am half inclined sometimes to believe, his carelessness was the real cause of it. Why did he leave her alone, such a wild, thoughtless, heedless creature as she was—plucky to a fault, and ready to dare anything. Why wasn't he by her side, either to defend her against the villain who assaulted her, or to save her from her own wilfulness?'

‘Oh! sir, pray do not discuss the matter any more, at least to-night,’ said Hindes, in a voice of abject entreaty. ‘Suppose you found out the truth, how could it alter matters now? Try to think that no one was to blame—that it was the will of Heaven—and that—’

‘No! no! Hindes, I cannot think that! ’

replied the old man. ‘ Her death may always be shrouded in mystery, but God never designed so young and beautiful a creature to die so foully. There is some villainy at the bottom of it, and I have not done with it yet, for, if ever I can discover the real author of the mischief, I will kill him with my own hand. I will, if he proves to be a prince of the blood royal.’

Henry Hindes did not answer for a few minutes, and then he said in a low voice,—

‘ Have I your permission to go home, Mr Crampton? I am not well, and this conversation has upset me. It is all too new, too fresh, my dear friend; it will not bear discussion yet. If you can do without me, I should be thankful to try and procure a little rest at home. We have to be early at the office to-morrow.’

‘ Go then, Hindes, by all means. I am afraid I am sadly selfish, but it is a relief in such cases to have a friend to unbosom oneself to. God bless you

for all you have done for me. I could never have gone through that ceremony to-day if you had not stood by my side. I will go up to my poor wife now, and see what I can do or say to comfort her.'

He grasped Hindes' hand as he spoke, and the two men separated for the night. Hannah was anxiously expecting her husband's return. She knew his emotional nature, and how he suffered after any trial to his feelings. She had been suffering through the day very much herself. In Jenny Walcheren, she had lost the female friend whose society she had enjoyed the most, and her sympathy with the bereaved and heart-broken parents was extreme. She wept more for their sakes than for her own, and she knew that her husband felt for them, equally with herself. But, as he entered her presence, she was shocked to see the ravages of grief upon his countenance. It seemed unnatural to her that he should mourn so deeply as this—as if, too, something more than grief mingled

with his feelings—if it had not seemed derogatory to his manhood, she would have said he must have become superstitious since Jenny's death, for he seemed to have grown frightened of shadows, and to glance about him with a startled air, as if he expected to see something that was not there. She was a sweet, placid-tempered woman herself, with a strong sense of religion, who would never have been alarmed at the idea of any supernatural appearances; who did not believe in them in the first place, and, if she had done so, would have said they came of God, and therefore could never harm those who believed and trusted in Him.

She could not, therefore, account for her husband's altered appearance, unless, indeed, there was something in his constitution which unfitted him for resisting the attacks of sorrow. And she had always been aware that he loved the dead girl equally with herself.

‘My dearest!’ she said, as soon as they

were alone, and he had cast himself upon a sofa, 'you must not give way like this, you must not indeed. You will make yourself ill if you fret so continuously, and you have your work to do, remember.'

'Do leave me alone,' he answered sulkily; 'it's all very well to preach, but everybody's not so cold-blooded as yourself.'

'Cold-blooded! Henry,' she exclaimed, 'Oh, don't say I am that with regard to our darling Jenny. I think I mourn her loss as much as you do. But you frighten me, my dear. You can have no idea how altered you have become in these few days. You are like a wreck of your former self.'

'It's enough to make a man a wreck, to pass through such trying scenes as I have been doing. You seem to forget that everything has fallen to my share. From that terrible inquest, to this afternoon's ceremony, Mr Crampton has depended on me for every mortal detail. You would feel like a wreck if you had done as much.'

‘Yes, yes, dear,’ she answered, soothingly, ‘for without having seen it all, I cannot get it out of my head. I have been trying so hard this afternoon to picture darling Jenny to myself, as she used to be—as I have seen her, a thousand times and more—with her bright, merry face and her saucy smile, driving those cobs of hers at such a rate through the town, without a fear or a care. But I can’t. I can only see that little, mournful, pale face which I looked on in her coffin, with its sunken eyes and closed lips, and—’

‘Damn it all!’ cried Hindes, furiously, as he leapt from the couch, ‘you have the most ingenious faculty of any woman I ever knew for torturing a man. Why on earth can’t you leave these harrowing details alone? What good does it serve to rake them up *ad nauseam*? Is that the way to make one forget? I cannot stand it any longer, I shall go to bed.’

And without another word, he rushed from the room.

Hannah was in dismay. She did not know what she had said to make her husband so angry with her. His irritation raised her suspicions. Had there been more in Henry's affection for Jenny Crampton than she had ever thought of? She was not a prying or curious woman by nature, but Hindes' behaviour was enough to make anyone suspicious. The mere idea was a revelation to her. Never in the whole course of their married life, now extending to eight years, had she conceived the slightest notion but that her husband cared for herself alone. He had never been very demonstrative, but, on the other hand, he had never been unkind. And yet, when she remembered how very lovely the dead girl was, she wondered she had never seen danger in Henry's familiar intercourse with her. She could not feel jealous of poor little Jenny now, lying so meekly, with her hands crossed upon her breast, out in the cemetery, but Hannah did feel very sorry for herself, and less effusive than usual towards her

husband. Yet, after all, as she told herself, it was only a supposition—it might turn out to be a delusion on her part—but she would watch Henry carefully, and find out the truth for herself.

CHAPTER IV.

HENRY HINDES had passed through the fearful ordeals of the inquest and bringing home and funeral of Jenny Walcheren with surprising boldness and equanimity, never having been betrayed into displaying more emotion than was considered becoming under the circumstances ; but, now that all possible danger was over—that all inquiries had ceased—and that the dead girl was laid in her grave, safe from prying curiosity, his nerve forsook him, and he was haunted by his own memory.

The dread which had oppressed him, ever since that fatal moment on the cliff, was set at rest. There was no chance that Jenny would bear witness

against him from her grave. The world had accepted what appeared to be the most natural version of the tragedy that had befallen her, and no tongue would reveal the truth, until the judgment day.

He was safe—his children's good name was safe—he might sit down securely amongst his Lares and Penates, and comment on the shocking number of murders, that were reported in the newspapers, with impunity.

Why, then, did his native audacity take that opportunity to desert him, and leave him a prey to his doubts and remorse? During the suspense and fear he had endured, he had never given a thought to anything but his possible danger; he had had no time, as it were, to grieve over the loss of the girl he loved; but, now that the danger was past, he could think of nothing else but Jenny, done to death by his own hand.

Had he been a better man, the terrible deed would never have been committed,

and, had he been a worse man, he would have sat down at this juncture, congratulating himself that all had ended so well for him, and banished the thought of her thenceforward. But Henry Hindes was neither a villain nor a hero. He was common clay, like the rest of us. And he had loved Jenny Crampton very dearly. He had not realised how much he loved her, nor how much he had longed to possess her, until the fatal truth was revealed to him by her marriage with Frederick Walcheren. He had seen her blossom into a bonny maiden day by day, and knew that her presence pleased and excited him; but he had not dreamt that his affection for her came between him and his duty to Hannah, until her lover came on the scene and she resented all interference between them. *Then* he realised what his true feeling for his partner's lovely daughter was; but subsequent events had caused him to think of nothing but the awful risk he ran. But now, the

worst was over—the high tension to which his nerves had been strung for the last few days was relaxed—and he had leisure to dwell upon what had occurred, and to recognise what his love for the murdered girl really was, and to feel that he would give his miserable life a thousand times over, if the sacrifice could only bring back hers.

He saw her, as well as Hannah, but in a dozen shifting moods. Now, she was flourishing her whip at him, as she drove clattering down the principal street of Hampstead, and then she was laughing at some funny story, or teasing her parents or himself, or pouting her pretty lips because they thwarted her, or thanking him with those lovely eyes of hers for the American candies, or the illustrated papers, or the hot-house flowers, he had brought her from town. But the picture, however fascinating, always changed to give place to that in which she stood at the edge of the cliff on the last day of her young life, defying him

with the contemptuous words,—‘ I hate you ! I hate you !’ He would go through the scene again and again ; would hear her mocking voice—see her indignant, flashing eyes—give the fatal push that snuffed out her bright being like the flame of a candle—and then stand gazing at the empty space where she had been but a moment before, and which now was void and silent.

In fancy, the wretched man would see what he never seen in reality—her slender body falling down the steep declivity, dashing against the pointed crags and projections of chalk every instant, and then arriving with a dull thump at the bottom, and lying on the rough shingles, without life or sense or motion. In fancy, he would cast himself down beside her and entreat her forgiveness, by every means of speech in his power—would tell her how passionately, how truly, how devotedly he loved her—that he hated and cursed himself for having given way to the impulse that prompted

him to touch her, and would die a million deaths to restore her bright beauty to life and strength again. This was the state of mind into which Henry Hindes fell as soon as Jenny Walcheren was buried.

He went up to his bed that night, a shivering craven. He had always professed to disbelieve in ghosts or anything supernatural, and to condemn those who credited the possibility of their appearance as fools or madmen.

But now he glanced around him as he entered his own apartment, as if he feared to meet the wraith of Jenny Walcheren lurking in the corner, ready to confront and accuse him.

The Hindes had always adopted the foreign plan of occupying separate rooms, so that he was alone, although his wife slept next him, with a door between them. Hindes wished that night that it were not so, for the sense of solitude bore in upon him very heavily, yet he did not like to propose seeking her companionship for fear she should guess

the agony he was undergoing. So he crept into his own bed, and lay there, sleepless, and staring vaguely into the darkness, as if he dared not close his eyes, lest a ghostly hand might be placed upon his shoulder, or a ghostly voice whisper in his ear. Hannah, following her husband upstairs, about an hour after, peeped into his room, to see if he required anything.

‘What, still awake, Henry?’ she exclaimed, seeing his eyelids quiver as the light of her candle fell upon them; ‘are you in pain? Shall I get you anything?’

‘No! no! I am all right! All I want is rest and quiet!’

‘Well, I will leave you! But you forgot your usual visit to the bairns this evening. I’ve just come from the nursery. You must have infected Wally with your wakefulness, for I found him sitting up in bed and crying for his dada.’

‘Wally wants me!’ exclaimed Hindes, springing out of bed; ‘give me my dressing-gown. I will go to him!’

‘He is quiet now, my dear. You need not disturb yourself,’ said Hannah.

But her husband was already out of the room and on his way up to the nursery.

‘My Wally, my Wally,’ he thought, as he sat with the little boy closely folded in his arms, ‘if anything should happen to him! If God should be revenged on me, by taking my child—I couldn’t bear it! I couldn’t; it would kill me! ’

Then he remembered that his friends had more than once said the same thing in his presence, and Jenny seemed to be standing on the opposite side of the carved cot, and whispering, ‘As you killed me! as you killed me! ’ and he laid little Wally hastily down again.

‘Dada’s boy will go to sleep now,’ he said to him, with a kiss.

But Master Wally liked better lying in his father’s arms, and was quite cunning enough to know how to get his own way.

‘No; Wally wants dada,’ he replied

fretfully, and but half-awake. ‘Wicked peoples come out of corners and frighten poor Wally.’

‘Wicked peoples! What do you mean, Wally?’ demanded Hindes, the perspiration breaking out immediately upon his face with apprehension. ‘There is no one here to frighten my Wally! Only Elsie and Laurie sleeping like good little girls in their beds, and nursie in the next room, with the door wide open.’

‘Oh, yes; there is,’ replied the little boy, oracularly; ‘peoples with black faces and white faces, and ladies with ribbons—’

‘Good God!’ exclaimed his father, with unnecessary fervour, ‘*what* ladies, Wally? Not a pretty lady, with curling hair—’

‘Oh, yes,’ cried the child, delighted to have found a theme to build his fables on; a ‘boo-ful young lady with long hair, just like Jenny that used to love me and bring me sugar plums. Dada, where is my Jenny? She hasn’t been to see Wally for a long, long time.’

So he was babbling on in his childish

ignorance and cunning combined, when Hindes suddenly left his side and called the nurse from the adjoining room.

‘Rosa, you must get up and attend to Master Wally. He is very restless to-night, and cannot sleep. Come at once.’ And then, with a hasty kiss to the child, he said, ‘Nurse is coming, darling. She will stay with you. Dada must go now,’ and bolted from the nursery.

Was it possible that Jenny had appeared to the boy? Would her coming portend good or evil? Surely she could never have the heart to harm the little child, on whom all his hopes were set. ‘As you harmed me! as you harmed me!’ he seemed to hear whispered through the darkness.

Had the man been in his sober senses, he would have recalled how many times Master Wally had invented the most marvellous stories of things which he declared he had heard and seen, in order to detain his parents by his side—things which, they both knew, existed only in

their little son's imagination. But to-night the childish fibs assumed gigantic proportions in the eyes of his craven-hearted father. He lay in his own bed trembling, as he recalled how fond Jenny had always seemed of Wally above the other children—how often she spent her money on toys for him—and how eagerly the little fellow used to welcome her appearance. Was it true she had visited his bedside, and had she come in love or anger?

He found it more and more impossible to sleep after this exciting incident, so he crept out of bed softly, that his wife should not hear him, and took a dose of the morphia which he had used before for the same purpose. He wished, as he drank it, that he had the courage to take the whole contents of the bottle, and so end his perplexities and regrets at once. But he had *not* the courage for that. Life was not yet a sufficiently heavy burden to him. The world had condoned his offence, and there were, doubtless, many years of peace and

prosperity before him. And, for the sake of Wally and the others, it was his duty to live on and struggle to forget. So he only took a rather full dose of the narcotic, and, after many moans and groans and restless turnings and tossings on his bed, nature succumbed to its influence and he fell asleep.

When he first woke in the morning, he thought he was all right again. His long sleep had removed his lassitude, and his mind was in a dreamy condition from the effects of the morphia, so that he was not in a fit state to worry himself by idle fears or expectations.

‘Come! come!’ he thought as he was dressing, ‘this is better! I was sure my nerves were unnaturally upset last night. If the feeling returns, all I need do is to have recourse to my little friend here. The worry I have gone through is enough to make any man ill. To make him exaggerate matters into the bargain, and see everything in its worst light. It was an accident, which might have happened

to scores of people who have not troubled themselves about the matter. I am not even sure, at this date, if I really caused the disaster! I put out my hand, I know, but I could not swear that I touched her. She stepped backwards, most likely of her own accord, and so fell over, without any aid from me! I believe it was so ; it is best I should believe it, for all our sakes. I shall mourn her loss none the less, dear, darling girl, because I persuade myself that it was Heaven's will and not my hasty temper that caused it.'

His wife was surprised to see the placid humour in which he descended to the breakfast-table. He did not eat much, it is true, but all his appearance of despair had vanished, until she began to think she must have been mistaken, and that his mood of the night before had been due to the cause to which he had ascribed it—over-fatigue and worry. Mr Crampton being about to start for the Highlands that evening, there was a good deal to arrange before they parted, so Henry Hindes went

off in good time to the city, and for the rest of the morning was immersed in business. The appearance of the poor father in his deep sables, and with his lowered tones and depressed air, did prick his conscience a little, but the influence of the morphia was still upon him, and a few glasses of wine soon dispersed the feeling. The first thing which renewed the discomfort of the night before, was the fact of Mr Crampton leaving the office, to seek that of his solicitor, Mr Throgmorton. Henry Hindes knew what he was going for, and tried to prevent him.

‘My dear friend,’ he said, in an expostulating voice, ‘I hope you are not thinking of putting the idea you mooted to me yesterday into execution. You must not, indeed. You will give me great pain if you do, for I neither deserve it, nor desire it.’

But the old man would not listen to him.

‘My dear Hindes, I shall tell you nothing about my intentions. They are

locked in my own breast. I do not know but that I shall not take your advice after all. My wife, as you reminded me, has many needy relatives who will be thankful to be remembered in my will. But you acknowledge the necessity for an alteration. You will come and see us off from Euston, at eight o'clock this evening, won't you? I know that my wife and Miss Bostock would be grieved to leave without shaking hands with you.'

'I will be there, without fail,' replied Hindes, as he walked to the office door with his partner.

'What a terrible change in Mr Crampton, sir,' remarked the clerk, who was waiting to speak to him on his return.

'Do you think so, Mr Davidson?' said Hindes, mechanically.

'Think so, sir? Why! it's the talk of the whole office. There's death marked in the poor gentleman's face. He won't be with us long, sir, I feel sure of that.'

'I trust you are mistaken, Davidson.

Mr Crampton's going away for change to Scotland to-night, and will not return to business until his health is quite restored.'

'I hope it may be, sir; I hope, I'm sure, with all my heart, that it may be, for Mr Crampton's been very good to all of us; but if you ask me my opinion, I don't believe he'll ever come back at all.'

'Well, I didn't ask your opinion, Davidson,' replied Mr Hindes, fretfully; 'and as Mr Crampton has the very best of advice, I think we may safely leave him in the hands of his doctor.'

'Oh! yes, sir, of course; and I hope I haven't said too much. But he does look very bad indeed—not like the same gentleman,' repeated the clerk, as he went back to his work.

This little conversation disconcerted Henry Hindes, and his uneasy condition was augmented by the entrance of an old friend, a Colonel Brinsley, whom he had known for years.

‘ My dear Hindes,’ exclaimed the colonel, as he threw himself in an arm-chair, ‘ you might knock me down with a feather. I was on my way here, when I met poor Mr Crampton. Never saw such a change in any man in my life. Why, he’s the shadow of his former self. Of course I’ve heard about the sad loss he has sustained, but, hang it all! Hindes, although it is a terrible thing to lose a child, it doesn’t as a rule shrivel a man up to half his usual size. He is a mere skeleton. His clothes hang upon him in bags. I never was more shocked in my life.’

‘ She was his only child, and he cared for her very much,’ replied Hindes, in a low voice, as he played nervously with a paper-knife.

‘ Ah! yes! yes! doubtless, and he lost her by some terrible accident or other, didn’t he? What was it? Some people say she committed suicide, but that doesn’t seem likely to me. Only, the young people of the present day think no more

of taking their lives than of threading a needle. How did it happen?’

‘It was an accident—a pure accident,’ said Hindes; ‘she fell over the cliffs at Dover.’

‘Very dreadful! No wonder the poor old fellow feels it! She was very pretty, was she not? The beauty of Hampstead, so they tell me. And only married a few days. How sad! Is it true that it was a runaway match?’

‘It was, but I think my partner would rather the matter were forgotten now that she is gone,’ replied Hindes.

‘God bless my soul, Hindes, you look very ill too, now I come to look at you!’ exclaimed the colonel; ‘have you taken it to heart as much as that?’

‘It has been a trying time for everyone concerned, naturally,’ replied his companion, ‘but I rather fancy my looks may be attributable to my having had a bad faceache lately, and been obliged to take morphia to induce sleep. It always leaves me feeling more ill than

before. But it is impossible to keep a head for business without rest.'

'True, but why don't you try opium by inhalation? That's the stuff to make you feel jolly! My wife says I shall ruin my health by it, but, as I've practised it now for twenty years and am none the worse, I fancy I shall continue it till I die. But only now and then, you know, only now and then. I contracted the habit whilst I was in China, where I suffered terribly from ague and fever, and it has never quite left me, so when I feel a fit coming on, out comes my hookah and, by Jove! in a quarter of an hour I'm ready to dance a jig.'

'It must be wonderful stuff,' said Henry Hindes, musingly.

'It's magical in its effects—perfectly magical,' returned the colonel, enthusiastically. 'I don't care if it's injurious, or not. I shall never part with my hookah till I die. You try it next time you have the toothache; my boy, and you'll thank me evermore.'

‘But where is it to be procured?’ demanded Hindes. ‘I thought the sale of opium was prohibited in England.’

‘So are the sale of several other articles that are in general use,’ said Colonel Brinsley, laughing, ‘but where’s a will, there’s a way, you know, Hindes.’

And thereupon he gave him all the necessary information for purchasing the deadly narcotic and using it as an anaesthetic, and took his leave, fully persuaded that he had done his friend Hindes an inestimable benefit.

CHAPTER V.

MR CRAMPTON'S prognostications, with regard to himself, proved to be but too true. He had intended to take his wife and sister-in-law to a lovely place called Fochabers, in the Highlands of Scotland, but, on the way thither, he was taken so ill, that it was thought advisable they should stop at Aberdeen for the sake of medical advice, within a month of which time the old man had an apoplectic fit, and died without recovering consciousness. The news of this disaster was a fresh blow to Henry Hindes, but the intimation of it was accompanied by such an earnest appeal from the widow that he would go to them and help them in this calamity, as he had done in the

last, that he was obliged to pack his portmanteau at once and start for Aberdeen, to go through the same painful scenes he had done before.

Mr Crampton's last wish was that he should be carried back to Hampstead and laid by Jenny's side. So the same melancholy preparations had to be made, the same melancholy coming-home to be gone through, and the same melancholy funeral rites to be solemnised, till Mr Hindes almost thought the former misery must have been a dream, and that Jenny Walcheren was only now being laid in her untimely grave.

No wonder that he looked ill and distracted, people said. The high estimation in which he had been held by the dead man was proved by the fact that he had left him half his fortune. No! not to him, perhaps, but to his son, which amounted to the same thing. For what Henry Hindes had dreaded and tried to prevent had indeed come to pass. His late partner's will left half his fortune,

which was to remain in the business, to Walter James Henry Hindes, the son of his best friend, Henry Hindes; the other half to be his wife's for her lifetime, and, after her death, her sister's, on the same terms; and, when both were deceased, it was to be divided between the child or children of his best friend aforesaid, Henry Hindes. So he was forced to take it; to benefit by Jenny's death; to see his offspring in the enjoyment of that wealth which her father had accumulated for her; and which, but for himself, she might have lived half a century to take advantage of.

Hannah was naturally delighted that their old friend had remembered her little son in his will, and could not understand why her husband would not hear the subject alluded to. However unhappy he may have been made by Jenny's death, still, as the dear girl was gone beyond recall, she could not see why their darling Wally, who surely must be more to his father than any friend, how-

ever missed and mourned, should not benefit by Mr Crampton's generosity.

The elaborate monument which Mr Crampton had designed for his daughter's grave, and had set in hand before he left for Scotland, was now complete and ready to be erected. This task also fell to Mr Hindes, for the widow was incapable of acting for herself, and looked to him for everything. It was a massive column of red granite, lettered in gold. It stood twenty feet high, and could be seen over all the monuments in the cemetery. A second inscription had been added to commemorate the father's death, and, a few weeks after Mr Crampton's funeral, the masons having sent Hindes word that their work was completed and the monument placed in the cemetery, he walked down by himself to see if the orders given had been properly carried out, before payment was made. He dreaded the task beyond everything. He had been alternately fortifying his courage during the last few weeks by doses of morphia, pipes

of opium, and glasses of brandy, until he had made himself physically, as well as mentally, ill. But he must go through this trial once, he said to himself, once and for all, for he had left off going to church lately. He was too great a coward to pass by the spot where *she* lay, twice every Sunday. But Mrs Crampton had commissioned him to see that the monument to her husband and daughter was properly erected, so he was compelled to do so. He could not afford to neglect the wishes of the widow of the man who had so greatly benefited his son. That cursed legacy would bind him her slave for life.

He entered the cemetery with folded arms, and his eyes cast on the ground. The plot of earth surrounding Jenny's grave had already been made beautiful by cartloads of flowering geraniums and other plants, transferred from the garden at The Cedars, and in the centre of them now reared the head of the red granite column. Henry Hindes knew the inscription by heart. He had seen it glaring at

him through the darkness of the night, and had repeated it to himself until it seemed to be written in letters of fire on the tablets of his memory. But he had not calculated what it would look like, revealed in the glaring light of day, calling out, as it were, by its golden letters, to all men to come and read of his infamy. He looked up at it, and it seemed to blind his eyes. Something floated before them like a mist that prevented his seeing distinctly, and yet the very stones seemed to cry out the words :

‘Sacred to the memory of Jane Emily Crampton, the only child of John Crampton, Esq., of this parish, who was killed by a fall over the Dover cliffs on the 14th of August, 1875, in the twentieth year of her age. “Thou God knowest.”’ After which was written : ‘Also to the memory of John William Crampton, her father, who survived her loss only five weeks. “Vengeance is mine! I will repay, saith the Lord.”’

Not a word of her marriage—not a mention of Frederick Walcheren’s name—

only those words and quotations, which, to those who knew the circumstances of the case, revealed but too plainly what the friends of the dead girl thought about her mysterious death. To the guilty conscience of Henry Hindes, it was almost as if the monument cried out to the whole world to come and read how *he* had thrown the daughter over the cliff, and killed her father into the bargain. It terrified and alarmed him. He would have liked to have rooted it all up again. But he knew it must stand there for ever—for centuries, perhaps, after his own death, an enduring testimony to his shame and remorse and disgrace. And it was Jenny—Jenny, whom he loved, who lay there, condemning him! The unhappy man sunk down on his knees before the red granite column, and sighed forth the anguish of his soul.

‘Oh, my darling! my darling!’ he groaned within himself. ‘You know, don’t you, that I never thought of the awful consequences of my hasty act—

that I never meant to harm you, that it was your unkind words that led me on until I was no longer master of my self. You know I didn't want to take your father's money—*your* money, Jenny, and I would give it back, with all that I possess myself, to undo the fatal accident of that day. For it *was* an accident, my darling—you must know that now; and how your miserable lover is suffering for his rashness. Oh, Jenny! if I could only think so! if I could only think so!'

He had buried his face in his hands, and was unaware of the approach of any one until he was roused by the voice of Frederick Walcheren demanding indignantly,—

‘And pray, Mr Hindes, may I ask by what right I find you weeping over my wife's grave?’

He had come as privately as possible to see the spot where they had laid his Jenny, intending to give himself the poor consolation of praying above her ashes for the repose of her soul; but, to find

his intentions forestalled, and by the man he so much disliked and distrusted, roused all the old Adam in him again. At the imperious question, Henry Hindes also felt the fighting spirit rise in his breast. The instinct of self-preservation made him resent the idea that it was anything out of the way for him to be found kneeling on the grave of his friends. He drew himself up haughtily and replied,—

‘I am not aware, Mr Walcheren, that this cemetery belongs exclusively to you, or that you have any right to forbid my mourning the loss of my friends. There are two victims beneath this stone. The father, as well as the daughter, owes his death to your behaviour. He has only survived her five weeks.’

‘My God!’ murmured Frederick below his breath, and then, looking at the inscription, he added, ‘But why is *my* name not recorded here? Why is there no mention that she was my wife? Whom have I to thank for this insult?’

‘The monument was designed, and the

inscription written by Mr Crampton himself, sir, before he died,' replied Hindes.

'I don't believe it,' cried Frederick, hotly. 'And these texts! They are a positive reflection upon me. They say as plainly as possible that there is a doubt about the manner of my darling's death—that she was not killed by accident but design. Is this some of your doing, Mr Hindes, as well as the suppression of my wife's real name?'

'I have already told you that the whole thing is of Mr Crampton's ordering. He did not believe in the legality of your marriage—that I know. As to the texts, he had his own reasons, doubtless, for selecting them, but he did not confide them to me.'

'And I have told you that I do not believe you. You were in all Mr Crampton's confidences, and a precious bad use you made of your knowledge. My poor girl told me as much as that. She said several times how much she feared and suspected you. She said you were

against her in everything, that you were always persuading her father to thwart her wishes and refuse her requests, and that she hated you for it.'

'She—Jenny—said—she hated me, and to—you!' exclaimed Henry Hindes. 'It is impossible. You are deceiving me. We were the greatest friends.'

'You may have thought so—*she* did not. And I will thank you to speak of my dead wife by her proper name, as Mrs Walcheren,' cried Frederick, in a fury. 'You should never have been allowed to call her by her Christian name, and I forbid you to do so now.'

Henry Hindes's natural impulse would have been to retort by saying that Mr Walcheren had no rights whatever in the matter, and he should call his late friend by what name he chose, but his former assertion was still rankling in his memory.

'Jenny said she hated me,' he murmured to himself, 'and to *him*! It was not on the impulse of the moment, then, as I hoped—as I have believed. She meant it

—good heavens!—she meant it, and I—I loved her so.'

His face was white as ashes as he turned it towards Frederick Walcheren.

‘We will not quarrel, sir,’ he said, ‘and especially here. I came to the cemetery this afternoon at Mrs Crampton’s request to see if her orders had been carried out, with respect to the initialing and erection of this monument, with neither of which, as I told you, have I anything to do. But since you doubtless would wish to be left in privacy, I will withdraw.’

Saying which, he made a low bow and walked out of the cemetery. But he had left his sting behind him. Frederick Walcheren no longer felt in the disposition for prayer, or even tears.

‘What is it about that man that makes him so repulsive to me?’ he thought, as he found himself alone. ‘He speaks fair enough, but there is something behind it all that I cannot understand. Well, they have taken care between them that I shall not want to visit this spot too often. My

poor darling! What must she think of their depriving her of the title which made her my wife. I was a weak fool for letting them take her from me so easily. But I little thought they would insult us both in this manner. Perhaps it is as well. She *is* my wife. No false inscription can unmake her that, God be thanked! And Father Tasker says I must wean my heart from all these earthly longings as soon as may be. One is squashed at anyrate. I shall never want to look upon her grave again, with those vile texts written beneath her dear name. "Thou God knowest." Yes, God *does* know that I am innocent of all blame in this matter, except of tempting her to leave her home. Well, well, it is not to be thought of. The sooner I turn my mind to other things the better.

He stooped down and gathered two or three little blue flowers that were blossoming above Jenny's remains, and, kissing them, put them carefully between

the folds of his pocket-book. Then he knelt down and said a prayer above her, and, dashing his hand across his eyes, turned slowly away. Meanwhile, Henry Hindes was walking back to The Old Hall, with his heart on fire. He had been trying hard to persuade himself lately that Jenny had meant nothing by the hasty words she had used to him just before her death. Hannah had reiterated so often how fond the girl had been of them both, and it had pleased him to think that she was right, and that, when he met Jenny again, there would be no cloud between them, but only the old feeling of affection. He had begun to address her, in the solitude of his own chamber, as his darling and his love and his true wife, from whom he had been separated only by the conflicting circumstances of the world. But Walcheren's statement had blown all his airy fancies away at a breath. She had really meant what she said. It had not been the meaningless outcome of a young

girl's petulance. It was ante-dated to the moment. Jenny had even told her bridegroom of a day of the feelings she entertained against her father's friend. The truth made him feel fierce and wretched and revengeful all at once. For the moment he was not sorry that he had pushed her over the cliff and deprived her and her husband of their life's happiness. But this feeling did not last, and it was succeeded by a paroxysm of unusual despair, in which both Earth and Heaven seemed to have arrayed themselves against him. He retired to his room on the plea of a headache, and there indulged in the custom which was fast becoming habitual to him—of inhaling opium until his senses were stupefied and all his fears laid to rest. He remained alone all the evening, and retired to bed without seeing his wife again. This was now so much his custom that Hannah was beginning to think nothing of it. She believed that her husband suffered from acute

neuralgia which necessitated his taking a soporific, after which it was unwise to disturb him. So she walked over to The Cedars, where she was always very welcome now, and tried to cheer up the two lonely women, who would persist in sitting down with their grief in their laps, instead of doing their utmost to dispel it. Hannah almost talked them into a promise that evening that they would spend the winter abroad. They had never visited Paris, and she pressed them so hard to have a little pity on themselves that Mrs Crampton actually authorised her to make inquiries about the best means of getting there, and which hotel would be the most suitable for her sister and herself to stay at. She therefore returned home, well satisfied with her success, and feeling she had done a good night's work. It was past her usual bed hour when she reached The Hall, so that, after a brief visit to the nursery, Hannah retired herself.

She was not very sleepy, however, so,

having dismissed her maid, she sat down in her room to discuss a new novel that Mrs Crampton had lent her. It was an interesting tale, and engrossed her attention to that extent that she pored over it much longer than she had intended.

She was first roused to a sense how time was going on by hearing a noise, as she imagined, in the passage outside her door, and glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, found, to her surprise, that it was past two.

The household must have long retired to rest. What, then, could the noise be which she had heard on the landing? Hannah was not a nervous woman as a rule, but it had sounded so much like voices, that she began to fear that some one might have got into the house with the intent to steal. She rose, therefore, and listened attentively. A moment's consideration showed her that the sound proceeded not from the passage, but her husband's bedroom. Perhaps he

was ill, and, perceiving the light in her room, had called to her. So she unclosed the door between them and peeped in. What she saw there paralysed her into a silent witness. She did not speak to him, but stood leaning against the door-post, listening with all her ears. She felt her flesh creep as the full meaning of his words riveted itself upon her memory, but she did not scream out, nor do anything to disturb the speaker.

Henry Hindes was in his night-shirt, sitting on, or rather leaning against, the side of the bed. He was not asleep ; at least his eyes were wide open, but it was evident that he neither saw nor heard anything around him. The sweat was pouring off his face, and his hair was damp with it, but it did not appear to inconvenience him, as he stared wildly into the darkness and muttered to himself,—

‘It was an accident, Jenny—you know it was an accident—I did not push

you intentionally— How could I tell it would cause your death?— Why did you aggravate me so?— Why should you hate me?— *I*, who love you—love you— My God! don't say it— I cannot bear it— cannot bear it! And to *him*, too— my rival — the man who stole you from me! Jenny! Jenny!—don't look so—don't speak so, or I shall push you over the cliff!— Ah! she is gone!—it is done! Why did I do it?— Why did I do it?— I have killed her, Jenny! My God! this is hell—hell—hell! ’

He glared with his opium-laden eyes straight before him, and had just sense enough left to catch sight of Hannah's white night-dress as she stood, horror-stricken, at the open doorway, through which a light streamed from her bedroom.

‘Ah!’ he screamed in terror, ‘don't come near me! Don't touch me—I didn't mean to do it, Jenny! It was the devil prompted me to push you!—

Have mercy! Don't haunt me. Don't haunt me, or you will drive me mad—mad—mad!

He slid down upon his bare knees as he concluded, hiding his face in his hands, and Hannah had just strength left to withdraw herself and close and lock the door between them.

She understood it all now! Her husband's unaccountable grief and sleeplessness and irritable temper. He was pursued by an undying remorse. And for what? Oh! it was terrible, terrible! Hannah reached her bed, but it was only to sink down by the side of it, and pour out her soul in prayer for her wretched husband and herself. And when she was exhausted with prayer and weeping, she threw her dressing-gown around her, and sat down to consider what she ought to do about the dreadful truth that had been made known to her.

Her husband was a murderer! There was no end served by disguising the

horrid truth from herself. He had pushed sweet, darling Jenny Crampton over the Dover Cliffs. Oh! how could he have done it? How *could* he have done it? Their pretty, loving Jenny! It was too awful to think of, but it was true! She had heard him confess it with his own lips! But the idea that she could desert him on that account, or deliver him up to justice on his own confession, never entered the wife's mind. He was hers, and she was his, for better or worse; there must be no treachery between them. He had told his secret to the darkness; with the darkness it must remain!

Only, how ought she to act herself, so as not to become a *particeps criminis*; what steps should she take to prevent further wrong? To betray Henry, even if she could have made up her mind to do so, would not bring back poor, murdered Jenny, or the old father who had followed her so quickly to the grave.

But the money which Mr Crampton had left in such good faith to the son of his 'best friend,' Wally should not touch it, now or ever. She would not let her innocent child's hands be stained by the touch of blood money. It must be spent on some other purpose. It should never go to Wally.

Hannah sat and pondered over these puzzles all night, how could she do her duty to her husband and children, and yet not become a participator in his crime—a crime which must, under any circumstances, have caused a great revulsion in her feelings towards him, but when connected with Jenny Crampton, made her feel as if it were impossible for her to live with him again. Yet, if she left him, what depths might he not fall to? The only hope for him seemed to be in her presence and protection.

But, for her children, it was different. At all risks, she would separate her girls, now growing old enough to understand the meaning of most things that took place

around them, from so tainted a father! Elsie and Laurie must leave home. Hannah felt as if she could not endure to see him kiss them again, or touch them with the hands that had sent their darling Jenny to her death.

She was not aware that her husband had adopted the fatal practice of inhaling opium. She attributed the strange manner which he occasionally exhibited, to too much alcohol, or the doses of morphia which he said he took for toothache. She would have borne patiently with all that, to whatever lengths he had carried it, but what she had heard was beyond the limits of woman's forbearance to tolerate. *Her* duty, perhaps, was to remain by him, but her children should, at all risks, be saved from contamination.

Henry Hindes came down the next morning, looking haggard and stupid and heavy-eyed, after the fashion of men who indulge too much in any sort of narcotic, but he could scarcely have looked worse than Hannah, who was as

white as her gown, and trembling with dread of what lay before her.

‘Henry,’ she said, as soon as their breakfast was concluded, ‘I wish to speak to you. Will you come into the library?’

‘What’s up now?’ he grumbled, as he followed his wife’s footsteps.

‘I will soon tell you. I have come to the conclusion that it will be better for my daughters to leave home. I intend to take them over to my old friend, Mrs Tredgold, this afternoon, and leave them with her for their education.’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ exclaimed Henry Hindes. ‘Send the girls away! Are you mad?’

‘I think not. You will understand my reason if you think a little. I do not consider that they ought to live any longer at home. And if Wally were old enough to leave my care, I should send him away too.’

‘I never heard of such an extraordinary thing in my life,’ said her husband, who, nevertheless, was becoming rather uncom-

fortable under the coldness and decision of her manner, so different from the gentleness of Hannah's general demeanour. 'What the h—l will you do next? How long have you arrived at this decision?'

'Not long,' she answered, passing her hand in a weary manner over her aching brow, 'but this is not all, Henry! The money that Mr Crampton left to Wally. The child shall not keep it. It must be drawn out of the business at once, and if it is useless to try and persuade Mrs Crampton to take it back again, it must be spent in charity. No child of mine shall touch it.'

'Hannah!' said her husband fiercely, catching her by the wrist, 'what does all this mean? You have some latent reason for talking to me in this fashion. What is it? I insist upon knowing.'

'I don't think there is any necessity to force me to put my meaning into so many words, Henry,' replied his wife, quietly, but with a fast-beating heart, as she disengaged her wrist from his

grasp ; ‘the reason is, that you have taken to talking in your sleep of late, and last night you were so noisy that I opened the door between our rooms, and I heard—*all!*’

Hindes became as white as a sheet, as he stood gazing at her, and breathing hard. After a long pause he said,—

‘Well, and what are you going to do?’

‘The money must be given up, of course,’ she answered, as quietly as if they were discussing the most ordinary topic, ‘and the children must be removed from home. It seems hard, but I could not—I could not bear to see them—playing with you, or caressing you.’

Hindes groaned and turned away. That he had rendered himself an unfit associate for his little ones, was perhaps the worst thing he had been yet called upon to bear.

‘And you, Hannah,’ he whispered after a moment’s pause, ‘what shall you do?’

‘I am your wife, Henry,’ she answered, simply; ‘my place is with you.’

‘You will stay by me—knowing all—hating all?’ he asked, fearfully.

‘Knowing all and hating all,’ she said softly, ‘but not necessarily hating *you*.’

He crept to her side and, burying his face in the folds of her dress, burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE town of Luton is almost entirely devoted to the business of plaiting straw for hats and bonnets. The windows of the cottages are filled with specimens of the art, from the finest plait possible, for the manufacture of Tuscan and Leghorn straw, to the coarse, rustic twist that has been so fashionable of late years. The town is, consequently, full of young women who, instead of going to service, earn their livelihood by plaiting straw. Amongst them was Rhoda Berry, who lived with her widowed mother in a cottage on the outskirts of the town.

Mrs Berry enjoyed a world-wide repute for being, what was called in olden times, 'a wise woman,' but who, in these

more enlightened days, would be spoken of as a clairvoyante. By whatever name one chose to call her, however, there was no doubt that she was a very wonderful woman, and possessed occult powers in no small degree. Had Mrs Berry been in a position to rent apartments in Bond Street, and to keep clean nails and a courtly manner, half the aristocratic ladies in London would have besieged her door for admittance. But, being unknown, excepting to the good people of Luton, she was fain to be content with the credit they accorded her, and the sixpences they could spare, in return for the prophecies she made for them. Notwithstanding the source from which she derived the best part of her income, Mrs Berry was held in high respect, and not a little fear, by her fellow-townspeople, and there were few found bold enough to taunt or jest with her on the misfortune which befell her daughter Rhoda.

Rhoda's story was a very common and a very sad one. About a year previous

to the time when we first see her, she had received an offer, from a London house in connection with the firm for which she worked in Luton, to take up her residence in town, in order to do some of the finishing work which was necessary after the straw had been made into shapes. She was a particularly skilled workwoman in the department, and the salary offered her was double what she could earn at home. Mrs Berry had not wished her daughter to leave her. She had foretold all sorts of disasters which would befall her in London, but the girl was dazzled by the advantages she was promised, and the pleasant life she anticipated leading. So she laughed her mother's prophecies to scorn, told her that 'forewarned was fore-armed,' and that she would be very careful to avoid the dangers she prognosticated. So Mrs Berry let her go, with a sad heart, but she never ceased to lay the cards for her absent child, and to foretell a disastrous coming-home for her.

And so it turned out! Rhoda Berry met Frederick Walcheren at some place of public amusement, from which he, struck with her beauty, followed her to her lodgings, made acquaintance with her, and pursued it until a fatal intimacy was established between them.

It was the old game of the moth and the candle! The young man, thoughtless and dissipated, dreamt of nothing higher than amusing himself; whilst the girl, flattered by his attentions and with all sorts of romantic stories, such as the Prince and Cinderella, and King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, floating through her brain, believed that love must conquer over every obstacle, and Fred would make her an honest woman in the end. And the end was—disgrace, dismissal and despair. Mrs Berry was sitting one evening, laying the cards for her daughter with a foreboding heart, when Rhoda rushed into the cottage with wild eyes and incoherent words, and a face of crimson, which she could only hide in her mother's lap. The

poor are much better to their relations in distress, or poverty, or shame, than the rich are to theirs. They don't hound them down, or turn them from their doors, or refuse to share their bite and sup with their less fortunate brethren. It is only the well-bred and well-educated and rich people who do such things. Mrs Berry received her daughter back with a good deal of regret. She often told her that she was a shame and a disgrace to her, and that her dead father would turn in his grave if he knew how badly she had behaved. But for all that, she kept her whilst she could not work, and nursed her through her illness, and would have stood up for her against any who had dared to cast a stone at her. But, as has been said, the wise woman was thought to be so powerful, and held in such awe by the residents of Luton, that no one would have risked offending her through her daughter. And Rhoda was a favourite amongst her young companions also. She was a superior sort

of girl. Her father had been a respectable city tradesman, who had failed before his death, and left his widow and orphan to shift for themselves. Rhoda had therefore received an education far above that of most of her associates, which should, indeed, have saved her from the fault she had fallen into, did we not know that it is a fault which is committed by ladies of every degree, though money, like charity, has the power to cover 'a multitude of sins.'

When Rhoda's baby was born, Mrs Berry had, unknown to her daughter, written to Frederick Walcheren to inform him of the event, and ask him what he intended to do to remedy the wrong he had inflicted on her child. His answer was that, much as he regretted the unfortunate termination to his friendship with Rhoda, it was out of his power to remedy it, as he was just about to be married to another woman. He enclosed a cheque for a hundred pounds, with best wishes for the girl's health

and happiness, and hoped she would forgive him for the unintentional injury he had done her.

Some people in the position of Mrs Berry would have said that Mr Walcheren had done 'the handsome thing' by her daughter, and that she was lucky to have got so well out of the scrape. But Rhoda's mother thought differently. She enclosed the cheque in another letter and sent it back to Frederick Walcheren, with an intimation that she could support his son without his help, and that she wanted no hush money for her daughter's misfortune. But she warned him that the curse of Heaven was on his marriage, and that it would come to no good, nor he either. When Frederick received this letter, he was on the eve of running away with Jenny Crampton, and, full of hope as he was, it still had the power to make him feel uncomfortable. But he had paid no heed to it. Rhoda Berry, in his estimation, was only a girl who had thrown herself into his arms, and he

thought a hundred pounds was very handsome pay for his amusement. If the old woman wouldn't take it, that wasn't his fault.

But he remembered it afterwards. He told both his cousin Philip and Father Tasker that, whilst he was bending in agony over the remains of his wife, he fancied he saw Rhoda Berry gibing at his misery, and rejoicing in it. It was the very last thing that poor Rhoda would have done; she had loved the *vaurien* too well to take any pleasure in what troubled him, but his conscience told him he deserved her scorn, and so he fancied she gave it him. Poor Rhoda did not have a very good time with her mother after her baby's birth, for Mrs Berry could not forgive her for having so totally disregarded all her warnings against the trouble that loomed in the future for her. There was not another girl in Luton, she declared, who would not have declined the London situation after what she had told her, but her daughter thought less of

her prophecies than strangers did. Had she not laid the cards for her the very evening before she left home, and did she not warn her, as plainly as she could speak, to beware of a gentleman with dark eyes and hair, who would promise her all sorts of fine things, but would leave her with a curse upon her back. And hadn't everything come to pass just as she had foretold, and wasn't the curse sleeping in a cradle at their feet that moment, in the shape of a little boy, as black as a crow?

It was the end of November by this time. Poor Jenny had been laid for months in her untimely grave, and Frederick Walcheren was hard at work studying for his ordination. Rhoda Berry had returned to her work of straw-plaiting at Luton, and everything went on the same in the cottage where her mother lived—except for the little child, and her subdued spirits.

‘Come! Rhoda,’ exclaimed Mrs Berry tartly, but not unkindly, ‘there’s that

brat of yours crying again. Take him up, do ! Nothing's good enough for him, I suppose, as it wasn't for his father before him ! My gracious ! I believe he grows uglier and uglier every day. You're as unlike as light and darkness. The child's a perfect nigger !'

Rhoda did not make any retort. She was a fair, slender girl of about nineteen, with blue eyes and yellow hair, a very elegant young woman in appearance, but of a sad countenance. She raised her youngster in her arms and kissed him fondly. He was certainly unusually dark for so young an infant, but bore unmistakably Frederick Walcheren's features and complexion.

‘Have you heard the news?’ said Mrs Berry. ‘Mr Jenkins has come in for five hundred pounds by the death of an uncle in Australia that he never remembers to have heard of. Mrs Jenkins is half out of her mind with joy. She couldn’t believe me last week when I told her there was money on the road

for them. She said there wasn't a creature in the wide world that it could possibly come from. But I'm always right. The cards never fail me, never. There's Fanny Benson pronounced out of danger this morning, notwithstanding all the doctors' verdicts. I met her mother in the street just now, and she says she's wonderful; been sitting up in bed and eating rice pudding. Why, when Mrs Benson came to me last Thursday, crying her eyes out because the doctor had said there was no hope, I told her it was all nonsense, and there was no death in her cards, nor nothing like it. I wish you'd let me lay the cards for you, Rhoda. It's ages since I've done so.'

'No! no! mother,' cried the girl, shrinking backwards. 'I would rather not, really!'

'But why not?' asked Mrs Berry, who was very proud of her gift of second sight, and could not bear to hear it discredited. 'You know how right they

came before you went to London. If you'd followed the cards then, you'd never have had that young crow upon your lap now. And I've never laid them for you, with your own cutting, since. Don't you believe in them, Rhoda?’

‘Oh, yes, mother. Perhaps it is because I believe in them so much that I don't care to see them laid for me. Troubles come soon enough without our knowing them beforehand. And if you were to tell me anything unpleasant—that I should lose my baby, or have some other trouble—I don't think I could bear it, mother, not just yet. I'm so eaten up with disappointment already.’

‘My poor girl,’ said Mrs Berry, compassionately, ‘you mustn't mind all I say about that little crow, Rhoda! He reminds me too much of your misfortune; that's why I speak short of him sometimes. But, bless you! I wish him no harm, nor will he come to harm either. He'll live to be a man, and a

comfort to you yet. I can read that in his face.'

'Thank God for it!' replied the girl, as she lifted the baby's brown hand to her lips and kissed it fondly. 'I know he's a disgrace, mother, but it would kill me to part with him now. He's all I've got left of Fred.'

'I don't know that, my girl. I've dreamed some strange things about that Fred (as you call him) lately. That's why I want to lay the cards for you. That marriage of his hasn't turned out well. I feel sure of it, though we've heard nothing of him since the letter he sent me to say it was coming off. He's in trouble of some sort, as sure as he lives. I can see so much by the influences round the child, and I verily believe it's death.'

'Not for him, mother,' cried Rhoda, quickly.

'If it's not for him, it's very near him; but, if you won't cut the cards, I can't say more. Your fate and his are so mixed

up, that I can't read one without the other.'

'Very well, mother, I will cut them,' replied Rhoda, as she laid her boy in his cradle, and seated herself at the table. 'You make me uneasy when you speak of Fred so, and I shall not rest till I know the worst.'

Mrs Berry produced her favourite pack of cards, which had been laid for all the inhabitants of Luton, and, having withdrawn some from the pack, directed her daughter to cut and shuffle the remainder, and lay them on the table in three portions, with their faces downwards. As she raised and dealt them out, she went on rapidly with her reading.

'There he is, you see,' she commenced, pointing to the king of clubs, 'as black as the little crow yonder. And I was right. There's death round him. If it hasn't come, it's coming, and it's for his wife, not for himself. See how he counts to the marriage ring in the lap of death. There's no escaping it for him, one way

or another. Shuffle them again, my dear, and cut as before.'

Rhoda did as she was desired, and her mother scrutinised the cards attentively.

'There's trouble around him, as sure as he lives, and danger threatens him very nearly.'

'Danger, mother? What danger?' exclaimed the girl, in a voice of alarm.

'Not illness or death, my dear, so you needn't look so frightened. But he seems to me to be surrounded by a net of some sort—as if there were people about him who are trying to take advantage of him—to rob him, perhaps, or to entangle him in difficulties. He is full of perplexities. I don't like the look of this fair man who is mixed up with him. He's an enemy of his, and has done him, or will do him, a great mischief. He's been a bad man to you, this Mr Frederick Walcheren, but he ought to be warned against those who are about him, and especially of this fair man, or he will get into more trouble still.'

‘Mother,’ said Rhoda, timidly, ‘do you really think that Fred has behaved so very badly to me? He never promised to marry me, you know—he never mentioned such a thing. I don’t say that *I* didn’t think of it, and hope for it, perhaps, but it was very foolish of me to do so. How could he have married me? He comes of a very high family, I have heard, and, under any circumstances, I am not fit to be his wife. Of course, I should have thought of that before, and weighed the consequences of my weakness, but then, mother, you see I loved him, and Fred loved me in his way, so we were equally to blame. Cannot you think of this trouble as you would if two children had gone out to play together, and the weaker of the two had fallen down and cut himself, whilst the stronger came back safe and well? We were equally thoughtless and equally wrong. Why should Fred be blamed more than I, because I have brought the worse trouble on myself.’

She looked up shyly to see how her

mother had taken her argument, when she saw, to her surprise, that Mrs Berry had sunk back in her chair in a trance. She was not alarmed, for it was an usual thing for her to pass under control ; but it struck the girl with a sense of awe. Presently her mother sat upright, and addressed her in her ordinary tone of voice.

‘If you love this man,’ she said gravely, ‘you must try to save him. In a few days it will be too late. He is about to imprison himself for life—to deliver up his will, his mind, his very senses, into the keeping of others, and he will be miserable under the discipline. You will not be able to dissuade him from his purpose now, but your visit to him will have a good effect. Don’t worry him about your own troubles. Only ask him to pause before he delivers himself over, body and soul, a prisoner for life. His wife has passed over. He thinks she died by an accident. It was not an accident. There was a man mixed up

with it—not very tall and rather stout, with light hair, plainly parted in the middle, blue eyes, a straight nose, and a pleasant smile. He is very particular about his hands and nails. He has been your lover's worst friend—and *her* worst friend, he—he—he pushed—her—over!'

Here Mrs Berry's control took flight, and she yawned once or twice and opened her eyes.

'Have I been asleep?' she said, as she met her daughter's startled gaze.

'Yes, mother,' replied Rhoda, who was much excited, 'and you have been telling me the most extraordinary things.'

'Who was it?' demanded Mrs Berry. 'Paul, or Daisy?'

'I don't know,' said the girl, in a bewildered manner; 'I never asked. But they said—I mean, you said—that is, whoever it was, said, that Fred is in great danger of some kind, and I must go up to London and warn him to be careful. And, his wife is dead—you were right—and they said something I couldn't under-

stand, about someone being pushed over somewhere: And they described a man who is Fred's worst friend. I don't know, how—but I am to warn him against him. And oh! mother, may I go to town and see him?' she concluded with glistening eyes.

'I don't half like the idea, Rhoda,' replied Mrs Berry. 'What should you go thrusting yourself into this man's way again for? He may quite misconstrue your motives.'

The girl drew herself up proudly.

'No, mother, he could hardly do that. I would not let him do that. Besides, Fred is a gentleman, remember. If I go to warn him, and ask him to consider before he takes any important step, he will know I only do it as a friend. And his poor wife is so lately dead, too. Please, mother, do me more justice than that.'

'I know, child, I know; but when there has once been such intimacy, it is hard to break through or forget it. However, if the controls urge you to go,

go you must. Do you know where Mr Walcheren is now?’

‘No, but I know his flat in Nevern Mansions, and, doubtless, I can find out his present address there.’

‘I won’t say anything for it, nor against it, Rhoda, but you mustn’t take the child. I won’t have my daughter calling at a gentleman’s house with a baby in her arms. Remember who your dear father was, and don’t make him turn in his grave, poor man.’

‘No, no, mother!’ replied Rhoda, as if such a feat were possible; ‘but I’m afraid it will be such a trouble to you if I leave baby behind me.’

‘You mean you think I’ll smack the little crow as soon as your back is turned. No, my girl, I’m not quite such a brute as that, though the sight of the little rascal does make me swear sometimes. But it’s only for your sake, Rhoda; I’ve no spite against the poor, innocent baby. After all, isn’t he yours before anyone else’s, and aren’t you the

only one I ever had to call my own? No, my dear, whatever happens, we'll stick to the little crow, you and I, and bring him up between us, and be mother and father both to him.'

And so saying, Mrs Berry lifted her little grandson from his cot and held him to her heart.

'Oh, mother, mother, when you talk like that, you do make me feel so happy,' exclaimed poor Rhoda, as she embraced Mrs Berry; 'indeed, I know what a trouble and a shame I've been to you, and baby too, but I can't help loving him, mother, never mind what he is. And you needn't be afraid I'll say anything to Fred to remind him of his obligations to me. I'm much too proud for that. Only, if he is in danger, and I can warn him, I feel it's my duty to do so; but if I find it's a mistake, and the lady is living still, I shall come straight away again, without seeing him.'

'It's no mistake, Rhoda; she's gone, sure enough, but I've no idea what danger

Mr Walcheren can be in, unless he's got into another scrape.'

Rhoda reddened like a rose.

'Oh ! no, mother, indeed ; it's something to do with men. The controls said so. It's all very misty to me, but one thing's clear—that I'm to go and see him, and my visit is to do him good. I sha'n't be more than three or four hours gone, mother, and I'm sure baby will be good with you for that time.'

So, the following day, the injured girl set forth, with her heart full of nothing but love and concern for the man who had ruined her good name, and an earnest desire to return him good for evil. How some women can forgive ! How they revel in forgiving ! They seem always ready to take their betrayers and traducers back into their loving arms, as a mother receives her child, at the first note of repentance.

Rhoda would have suffered very keenly at any other time on re-visiting London. Here it was that she had dreamed such

delicious dreams, and woke up to find them delusions! Here it was that she had been publicly dishonoured and disgraced, and told to go home to her mother, and receive her reproaches, alone, friendless, and without protection!

But she forgot all that trouble now that she was on her mission of mercy to Frederick Walcheren. She went to his flat in the Nevern Mansions first, and found it had been let, furnished, to new tenants.

‘Can you,’ she asked timidly of the servant who had opened the door, ‘give me the present address of Mr Frederick Walcheren?’

At this appeal, the mistress of the apartments came to have a look at her, and seeing that she was not a beggar, said she *had* received Mr Walcheren’s address, for the purpose of forwarding his letters, but she did not know if he would receive any visitors.

‘I can but try,’ replied Rhoda, gently; ‘and if I cannot see him, they may deliver a message for me.’

‘That is true,’ said the lady ; ‘and, if you are a friend of his, you may as well take a packet of newspapers that have been waiting an opportunity to go to him.’ She gave Rhoda a large parcel of papers and magazines as she spoke, and added : ‘Mr Walcheren is staying at present at Canon Bulfil’s college in Winters’ Lane, Southwark.’

‘Thank you very much,’ returned Rhoda ; and then she said wistfully, ‘May I ask you, madam, if the report I have heard of the death of Mr Walcheren’s wife is true ?’

‘Oh ! dear, yes. That happened months ago,’ replied the lady, as she closed the door again.

One part of her mother’s revelation was true then, and so might the rest be. Rhoda knew that Frederick was a Catholic, but also that he had been a very lax one, as he had been lax in everything else, and could not help wondering what on earth he could be doing in a college. And, whilst sheltered within its walls, what danger could threaten him ? He had been

such a joyous, devil-may-care young fellow when she knew him, that she could not fancy him mured up in a religious house. What sympathy could he have with its inmates? What pleasure could he derive from its customs or mode of living? However, she would fulfil her mission, whether her warnings were needed or not. It was a long journey down to Southwark, but Rhoda reached it at last, and found her way, by dint of inquiries, to Canon Bulfil's college. It was a large, red brick building, more like a jail than anything else she could liken it to, and Rhoda felt very timid as she pulled the iron chain which sustained the bell, and heard the loud echoes it evoked in the vaulted hall beyond. It was answered by a lay brother, who demanded, in a grave voice, what was her business.

‘I have come with a packet and message for Mr Frederick Walcheren, and wish to see him,’ replied Rhoda.

The man unlocked the massive door, and admitted her to a cold-looking pas-

sage with brick walls, unpapered and unpainted.

‘What name shall I say?’ asked the lay brother, as if he were conducting a funeral.

‘Say, please, that I have come from Mrs Pattison,’ replied Rhoda, who had ascertained that was the name of the tenant of the flat in Nevern Mansions.

After what appeared to her to be an unconscionable delay, the man returned and ushered her into a parlour, the only furniture in which was a piece of matting on the oaken floor, a large table, four rush-bottomed chairs, and a fald stool placed in front of an oil painting of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Rhoda, remembering the luxury in which Frederick Walcheren used to live and revel in, thought it all very cold-looking and uncomfortable and precise, and wondered how he enjoyed himself there, and what could make him stay.

In a few minutes the door opened, and Frederick himself appeared. For the first

moment, Rhoda did not recognise him. His dark hair was cut close to his head, he had shaved off his moustache, and wore a long, black cassock, which reached to his heels. His face was pale and care-worn, and darker than usual. As he recognised his visitor, he gave a slight cry and staggered to a chair.

‘Rhoda,’ he exclaimed, faintly, ‘what on earth have you come to see me for?’

CHAPTER VII.

THE girl was almost as taken aback as he was.

‘Is this you, Fred?’ she said, in a tone of the utmost astonishment. ‘What have you done to yourself? I hardly knew you.’

But he only asked again,—

‘Why have you come? What do you want with me? I thought our acquaintanceship was at an end.’

‘I have not come to ask anything of you, Fred,’ said Rhoda, in a reproachful voice. ‘I think you might know that without my telling you. I am here as your friend only. I heard that you were in trouble, and I wanted to see if I could be of any use to you.’

‘Thank you, thank you,’ he replied

nervously. ‘It is kind of you to have thought of it. Won’t you sit down?’

Rhoda seated herself on one of the rush-bottomed chairs, whilst Frederick took another as far as possible from her.

‘What is it that I can do for you?’ he commenced, in a stiff voice.

‘Nothing,’ replied the girl, ‘only tell me about yourself. Is it true that you are a widower? I am so sorry for you! And why are you living in this place? What have you to do with a training college?’

‘I am here as a probationer, or novice, Rhoda. It is evident you know nothing about me. I am about to enter the Church and become a priest.’

‘A priest! Oh, Fred, never! *You* a priest? You’ll never stick to it. You will be tired to death of it in three months.’

This prophecy seemed to offend the young man exceedingly, the more so as he had occasional doubts whether it might not be true.

‘You do not know what you are talking of,’ he returned, grandiloquently. ‘A priest once is a priest for ever. There will be no going back. Once ordained, my fate is fixed for life.’

‘Will there be *no* getting out of it; not even if you thought it right?’ exclaimed Rhoda, with open eyes.

‘Certainly not. Once admitted to the Church, there can be no leaving her without everlasting disgrace and loss of one’s salvation.’

‘Oh, Fred!’ cried the girl, ‘think twice before you take such an irrevocable step. You will repent it; I am sure you will. But what made you think of it? What put such an idea into your head?’

‘The Almighty, in His infinite goodness,’ replied Frederick. ‘You have heard, you say, of my great loss. It was that which first brought me to my senses. It was so sudden—so terrible! I could see God’s finger of wrath so plainly in it, that it mercifully opened my eyes to my true condition.’

‘Do you think, then,’ said the girl, timidly, ‘that God revenges Himself on us for our petty, thoughtless sins, by torturing or cutting off the life of some one we love? If *you* were the sinner, why should *she* have died to bring you to a sense of your wickedness? Why should an innocent girl be used as a burnt-offering for your sins? And how can you better matters by becoming a priest? Are there not plenty of priests? Is it impossible to show God that you are sorry for the past in some other way?’

‘Rhoda, as you truly say, you do not understand. You have not been brought up in our blessed faith. I wish you had. Then you would know there is no expiation for sin without blood shedding. When my beloved wife was taken from me I was nearly mad—’

‘Tell me of her,’ interposed Rhoda, softly. ‘I would rather hear about her than the Church.’

‘Oh! Rhoda!’ exclaimed Frederick,

with the selfishness of grief, not heeding how his praises of the dead might sting the girl before him, ‘she was so young, so loving, so beautiful. She was the most perfect creature I have ever seen. And we had been married only one day, when she met with a terrible accident that deprived me of her. She fell over the cliffs at Dover and was killed on the spot. It nearly drove me out of my mind.’

‘Poor Frederick!’ said Rhoda, kindly.
‘But are you sure it was an accident?’

‘I am sure of nothing, except that my darling parted from me in health and spirits, and that I never saw her alive again. She was found at the foot of the cliffs, crushed to death. Some thought she might have thrown herself over, but I am sure she did not do that; but whether some villain insulted her, or tried to rob her, and so made her take a false step, in agitation and alarm, I cannot say. No one will ever know the truth now. The only

thing certain is, that God has taken her from me, and that I shall never see her again this side Eternity.'

'Poor Frederick,' repeated the girl, gently. 'But why should you become a priest because of that? It will not bring your wife back to you.'

'Not in this world, Rhoda, but in the next. I need not mind saying to you that I have been a very bad man, and led a sinful life. You know it only too well. My mother intended me for the service of the Church, and educated me, up to the age of twenty, with that end in view. But, as soon as she died and I became my own master, I left college and entered the world, and you know the bad use I made of my time whilst there. I have to ask your pardon, Rhoda, for the way in which I treated you.'

'Don't, don't,' said Rhoda, quickly. 'I can't bear it. I have not reproached you, Frederick. Nor, in my own heart, have I blamed you. I always spoke my mind, you know. We were very happy whilst

we knew each other, and thought we cared for each other, and if we have had to “pay for our whistle,” let us do so bravely, and without any cant. I have borne my share without crying out. Do the same by your’s. God will accept our secret grief and prayers quite as soon as any public display of regret.’

‘I daresay you are right,’ replied the young man, who, however, did not like being cut short in his protestations of repentance; ‘but to return to what we were talking of. My godfather, Sir Frederick Ascher, who died before I can remember him, left me all his property, coupled with a hope that I should either enter the Church, when it would be confiscated to its use, or, failing that, that I should leave it to the Church at my own death, or endow some ecclesiastical building with it. This behest I laughed at, and had no intention of obeying until my eyes were so mercifully opened to the sins of which I had been guilty, and I saw that the only reparation

I could make to Heaven, would be to do as my dear mother and godfather wished me, and become a priest.'

'But how,' demanded Rhoda, 'will that repair the wrong you have done in the world? It seems to me that it benefits really no one.'

'Oh, Rhoda! you speak in ignorance,' said Frederick Walcheren. 'In right of my blessed office, I shall have the privilege of offering the Mass for the repose of the souls of those I have loved and injured, every day. I shall live, as it were, in the sight of Heaven, and weary it with prayers for the pardon of my own sins, and the sins of those I have led, by my example or otherwise, into error; I shall live, I trust, blameless, henceforth, in the eyes of God and men, so that, when my time comes to leave the world, I may be found worthy to join my friends and relatives, and to live in the sight of God and angels for evermore.'

'And could you not effect these objects

just as well by living in the world, instead of burying yourself alive?' asked Rhoda drily.

'I could not trust myself to do it, Rhoda. My aspirations are good, but my flesh is frail, and the temptations of this life might prove too strong for me.'

'Then I don't see much good in your repentance, Fred,' said the girl. 'If you are obliged to shut yourself up to prevent your sinning, your abstinence cannot be of much value in God's eyes. Your virtue will lie in the four walls of your clergy house, not in yourself.'

The young man sat silent. He did not like the tone adopted by his former friend. It was too much an echo of something which he could not drive out of his mind, nor his heart.

'Is this all you have to say to me, Rhoda?' he asked after a pause.

'No, Fred. I came up from Luton this morning expressly to see you. I heard, through my mother—you know

how—that you were in trouble and danger, and I see now that both reports were true. I couldn't think what the danger might be! I was told that you were being entangled in a net that would close round you, and deliver over your soul and body into the keeping of others. I understand what they meant now! When you have become a priest, you will no longer be a man. You will be a slave, obliged to go here, or there, or do this or give up the other, as your superiors choose.'

'But it will be all for my good, Rhoda. I am not fit to look after, or take care of, myself.'

'Perhaps so, but I entreat of you, Fred, not to do this thing in too great a hurry! You are not in a fit state to judge for yourself at this moment! You are so grieved by the loss of your wife, that you have but one wish—to give up the world and everything in it, and be left to yourself and your own thoughts for ever. I know what the feeling is! Do

you suppose that I have not felt it also? Do you suppose that I do not know what it is to despair of God's existence, and to believe that He neither sees nor hears what His unfortunate creatures are doing or suffering?'

'*You*, Rhoda, you? But what trouble have you had to make you despair like this?'

The girl turned and looked him full in the face. Was it possible that he could be so selfish and absorbed in his own sorrows, as entirely to have forgotten hers?

'You don't mean to tell me that you cared for me as much as all that?' demanded Frederick, with a touch of the old vanity.

'No!' she answered, 'no! I did not care for you as much as all that, and if I had done so, the time is past for telling you of it! Let me finish what I was going to say to you! Be warned by me! If you become a priest, you will regret it. You are not fitted by

nature or constitution, for such an artificial life, neither is your present feeling a permanent one. I feel it! Something tells me so! Your mind has been upset, and you are not capable of judging for yourself! Don't take the final step without further consideration. And tell me one thing! Do you know a man, not very tall but rather stout—with blue eyes and fair hair, parted down the middle—a man with a pleasant smile and manner, and who is especially natty about his hands and nails?’

‘Yes, yes!’ cried the young man; ‘what of him? I recognise your description perfectly.’

‘He is an enemy of yours, Fred!’ replied Rhoda. ‘I was told to tell you that he—’

‘Stop!’ cried Frederick, suddenly. ‘*Who* told you?’

‘Mother did, last night, or some of her controls. I told you, ages ago, you may remember, that she has the gift of second sight.’

‘A soothsayer—a woman with a familiar spirit—condemned alike of God and our holy Church!’ exclaimed her companion excitedly, ‘and you bring me warnings and admonitions from such a source! Away—silence! I will hear no more of it. I sin each moment that I listen. My poor friend, do you know the danger you run by giving heed to anything you may hear from such a source? You are playing with the devil—listening to his advice, delivering your soul into his hands. You must promise me never to have any dealings with such people again, or you will imperil your immortal soul.’

But Rhoda, though deeply attached to the man before her, was too sensible a woman not to have opinions of her own, and the courage to stick up for them, into the bargain.

‘Not have dealings with my own mother!’ she retorted; ‘what will you tell me next, I wonder! If you don’t choose to heed what I say to you, it’s no fault

of mine, Fred, but I've done my duty in telling you what was told to me. And as for its being wrong, I don't believe it. If my mother's controls were evil spirits, why did they warn me against you before ever I came to London, and say that nothing but trouble would come of our intimacy? Why didn't they tell me that life was short in this world, and I had better make the most of it whilst it lasted, instead? No! that was *your* teaching, not theirs; but you'd like to make out your principles the better of the two! You may not take my advice. I can't help that, but don't set up your own against it, for you'll only anger me, and I came to see you from a pure wish to do you good.'

And with that, and a suspicious sound in her voice as if she could not trust herself to speak any more, Rhoda gathered up a little shawl she had carried over her arm, and her umbrella, and prepared to quit the room.

‘Rhoda, don't be vexed with what I

said,' replied Frederick. 'You did it in good faith, I am sure, but I must obey the teachings of our most holy Church on the subject. She strictly forbids all tampering with such knowledge—with any communications from spirits of the dead. We are taught to regard them with horror, as temptations from the Evil One, and sent in order to lure us to our own damnation.'

'Yes,' said Rhoda, incredulously. 'But I thought that saints in the Roman Catholic Church were often made so, because they had seen or talked with spirits of the dead, and that the Pope called a convocation to decide if such reports were true, and, if they were, the saintship was confirmed.'

'That may be correct, Rhoda, but it is very different!'

'How?'

Frederick began to fidget.

'Well, you see, the reports, as you say, are confirmed by a court of inquiry, and established by the approval of the Church,

so that there remains no doubt of their honesty and—'

‘You need say no more, Fred! My mother is as much to me as your Church is to you—perhaps a little more—and I have the same faith in her honesty, and impossibility of dealing with the devil, so that we may cry quits.’

‘I hope I have not offended you,’ said Frederick, ‘but I dare not listen to communications from such a source! If not actually ordained, I am pledged to become a minister of the Church, and am bound to follow her commands in everything.’

‘Poor Fred!’ said the girl, compassionately, ‘I can do nothing more for you, so I had better go. Good-bye! Believe how I sympathise in your great trouble—that I would have saved you from it, if I could. I don’t suppose that I shall ever see you again, but I shall never forget you—never!’

She held out her hand to him as she spoke, and the warm human touch seemed

to Frederick Walcheren like a last farewell of the world he had loved so much.

‘One moment, Rhoda,’ he said tremblingly; ‘you said, just now, that you had had sorrow enough to make you despair. What was it? Was it connected with me?’

‘You know how you left me,’ she answered, colouring; ‘surely I needn’t remind you of that.’

‘No, no; but I thought, perhaps—I hoped, as you had said nothing of it, that—that—’

‘That God had mercifully buried the proof of your treatment of me, with your other sins, I suppose, Fred,’ replied the girl, scornfully.

‘Your mother wrote me a letter some time ago now, I remember (but later events have put it out of my head), and I sent her a cheque for one hundred pounds, for expenses, but she returned it to me, and said she did not want it. And not having heard since—’

‘You flattered yourself you would never

hear again,' retorted Rhoda. 'Well, you were right! You never will! Good-bye!'

But he would not let her go.

'Tell me,' he urged, 'tell me everything! Don't think, because I'm going to be a priest, that I have lost all trace of human feeling. Is the child alive and well? Is it a boy or a girl?'

'What is the good of my telling you?' asked Rhoda, dashing away the tears that had risen to her eyes. 'You'll never see him, nor will he call you "father." But since you ask me, he is a boy, and strong and healthy, and I love him dearly. Is that sufficient?'

'My little son,' said Frederick, musingly. 'The only child I shall ever have, and him I have disgraced, God forgive me! Rhoda, you must let me settle some money on this boy before my fortune passes out of my hands. He is mine; you have no right to refuse me.'

'No, no, I will not have it; he shall not take it!' exclaimed Rhoda, passion-

ately. ‘Mother and I have enough for him, and he shall never know who his father is. Don’t be afraid but that he will be well looked after. He is all—all—’ with a sudden break in her voice—‘that I have left.’

In a moment the injury he had done this girl, whose existence he had almost forgotten, flashed across Frederick Walcheren’s mind.

‘Oh! let me make you some amends,’ he cried. ‘Don’t leave me with this remorse tearing at my heart. If you do, the child and you will come between me and my prayers. The money is my own still, to do as I will with. Let me put a thousand pounds in the bank—only a thousand pounds, Rhoda—in your name, that you may have something to fit the boy out with when he is of an age to enter the world.’

But she shook her head.

‘I will not take your money,’ she said.
‘I will not be paid for my love.’

‘Then what can I do for you?’ he

cried, in a voice of despair. ‘How can I show you how sorry I am for the past —how much I would do to repair it?’

‘If you wish to make me happier,’ she answered, turning so as to face him, ‘*don’t become a priest.* Give up this mad idea. You will regret it bitterly if you do not. Ah, Fred,’ she continued, drawing closer to him, ‘I don’t ask—I don’t wish to be anything to you ever again, but come back to the world and live in it a little longer before you take a step you can never recall. I do not expect, nor ask to receive, your love. I know that has gone from me to the girl you made your wife, but if I can comfort you by my friendship and my devotion, it will be yours to your life’s end. Come back and let me try and comfort you for all you have lost. I will be your servant and your friend, and nothing more, so long as I can smooth your path in life. Dear, dear Fred, you know I loved you! Let us go away to some distant land together till your grief is assuaged and your mind

is more fit to decide upon your future plans.

She laid her hand affectionately upon his arm as she spoke, but he flung it from him as if it had been a serpent.

‘Woman!’ he cried, ‘have you been sent from the devil to torture me and tempt me to forsake my duty? Leave this hallowed spot. Go back and wallow in the Slough of Despond from which I have been lifted. Are you mad to speak to me like this? What hellish design have you in your brain regarding me? Do you want to drag me down to the abyss with yourself? Go, and never come near me more! You have planted a sword in my breast that it will take weeks, perhaps months, to draw forth again. Go, go! Don’t let me curse you! Oh, God! have I not suffered enough without this? Is it Thy will to crucify me afresh? *Sancta Maria! Ora pro nobis!*’

And, with a look of agonised entreaty at the pictured face that hung above the

mantelpiece, Frederick Walcheren crossed himself and fled from the college parlour, and Rhoda saw him no more.

She was a little offended and very much hurt to have her overtures received in so ungracious a manner. She cried bitterly as she took her way back to Luton, but she told her mother nothing beyond the bare facts of the case. Fred was no longer the gay, *debonnair* young man she had given her heart to. So much the easier, she told herself, to forget all about him. Still, as she dreamt over the past, she could not but believe that, some day, she and the father of her child would meet again.

CHAPTER VIII.

As soon as Frederick Walcheren had left Rhoda's presence, he hurried to his private study and locked himself in. His interview with her had greatly disturbed him. For not only had it brought back the past in all its vividness, but made him conscious how dear that past had been to him—how dear it was still!

He sat down by the table and buried his face in his clasped hands. How plainly he could see all that he had promised to relinquish. The racecourse and the cricket field, the regattas and the football matches, the private theatricals and the picnics. And then the midnight revelries. The theatres and music-halls and dances he had attended and enjoyed with all the zest

of youth and health combined. Was it possible he should never, let him live to the age of a hundred, see them evermore?

It was not that Frederick mourned the loss of such pleasure now. Jenny, and Jenny's cruel death, were still uppermost in his thoughts, and the idea of dissipation of any sort was repulsive to him. His passion for the pretty, petulant, self-willed daughter of old Crampton had been no chimera of his passing fancy. It was an ingrained feeling of his soul; a love which he would never forget nor replace to the last day of his life! But Jenny had now been gone for some months, and the fierce desire that had first obtained the mastery over him, to kill himself, or hide himself for ever from the world, was not so vehement as it had been. Rhoda's warnings had affected him chiefly because he felt that they were needed—that she was right in saying that he might live to repent the step he was about to take, and that he would do well to pause and consider before he made it irrevocable.

He had bade the poor girl begone, and told her she was an emissary of the devil, because her entreaties, that he would give up the idea of entering the Church, and go to some distant land with her, had taken so pleasant a hold on his imagination. In fancy, he had beheld himself in the wilds of Northern India or South America, wandering through totally new scenes, and Jenny's memory becoming fainter and fainter as time went on. The picture had been too fascinating! He dared not dwell on it.

And instead, he had chosen the cloister and the interminable services, and the strict standard of living and seclusion of a priest! Had he been wise? Had he been wise?

In the solitude of his own chamber, and to his own heart, the young man could not deny that the future held but few charms for him. In the violence of his untutored grief, he had seized at the first rope held out to him that seemed likely to guide him to a haven of peace.

He had been willing then to sacrifice everything for the chance of seeing his beloved again, to secure their reunion, to make sure they should not be parted for ever. But Rhoda's searching questions had shown him what was really in his heart, and increasing instead of diminishing his discomfort. He was terribly afraid he had mistaken his vocation. He might make a priest, for he was clever and highly educated ; he would also, he hoped, faithfully stick to his duty, but would he be an honest and conscientious one ?

Frederick shuddered when he thought of the answer to that question, for his ordination was drawing very near. The day when he would take the final vows upon himself was close at hand, and, after that, there would be no drawing back. All would be fixed and settled for him. After that, the rising at dawn to celebrate early mass for the rest of his life, the daily services, the administering of sacraments, the cloistered prayers, the grave address, the repression of all laughter and

jesting and pleasure for evermore. And yet, his heart had beat faster to think of worldly amusements and merriment and brave companionship.

As he mused over these things, Frederick groaned within his clasped hands. Could he stand it all, he thought—could he go on for the rest of his life—he was only just thirty, he might have another half century of work before him—in a service so utterly opposed to all his tastes and habits?

He was still pondering on the subject, when a second visitor was announced for him. It was his cousin Philip, who followed on the steps of his messenger.

‘Well, Frederick,’ he commenced, shaking hands, ‘I thought I would not pass another day without coming to see you. Father Tasker tells me you have made such rapid progress with your studies that you are going up for ordination some weeks sooner than was intended. I congratulate you heartily. Your fate is now settled. Your life for

this world and the next provided for. What a blessed privilege! Were it not for Marion and the children, I could find it in my heart to chuck up everything and follow your example. It must be a state of such complete calm and security and happiness. The very gate of Heaven. You lucky fellow!'

'Do you think so?' demanded Frederick, in a melancholy tone.

'*Think so?* My dear friend, there's no thinking in the matter. It is an assured certainty. You have dedicated the remainder of your life to the Church, and in return she gives you everlasting bliss. There can be no doubt on the matter. From the day of your consecration to her service, she will stand security for your salvation. What can be more assuring—more consolatory?'

'The Church can only stand security for my everlasting happiness if I fulfil my duties from my heart. What about Luther and his nun? Had they not pledged themselves to God's service for

ever? Did that secure their salvation? Will the Church allow they are in Heaven at the present moment?’

‘My dear Frederick, what put those two unfortunate heretics in your head? Surely, you do not liken yourself to either of them?’

‘Perhaps I am not so good as they were! No, Philip, I do not wish to liken myself to anybody, but I sometimes fear that I am not worthy of the high calling I propose to take upon myself. I find my heart is still too much with the world—not sufficiently weaned from earthly things, and though my trouble is still so fresh that I have no inclination to mix in the scenes I used to love, I am afraid it only needs time to make me enjoy them as much as heretofore.’

‘My dear cousin, before that time arrives, you will be folded in the bosom of the Church, and she will keep you safe from all the dangers you have so mercifully escaped since you turned your eyes once more towards her. Have no

fear! Once ordained, your sacred calling will wrap you round as a mantle, and keep you from every harm. You will have nothing to do with the world. Her voice will be drowned in that of God.'

'You do not understand me, Philip. If the devil is in my heart, nothing will eradicate him. My sacred vestments will become a mockery—a falsehood. I am afraid I have been too hasty in deciding on this. I was so mad with grief when it was first suggested to me, that I hardly calculated what I was signing my name to. But I see more plainly now, and I feel afraid. This ordination must be put off. I will not go up for it with these feelings in my mind. It would be a sacrilege.'

Philip Walcheren now felt really alarmed. If Frederick once left the college again, they might lose him for ever. And his money would go with him. It was not to be thought of for a moment. At all costs, the notion he had got into his head must be battled with and overcome. But not by force—by suasion.

‘My dear Frederick,’ he commenced mildly, ‘these feelings do honour to you. They prove your modesty—your want of self-esteem—your high standard of the duties that lie before you. But, at the same time, they are a worse temptation to you than those of the world you were speaking of. Your thoughts come straight from the devil, Frederick, who, under the guise of humility, is trying his utmost to dissuade you from pursuing the glorious career you have dedicated your life to.’

‘Even if my fears do come from the devil, Philip, it is better that I should not do this thing without further consideration. There is no real hurry. Next month, or next year, will do just as well for my ordination. I don’t think the world will lose much from the want of my ministrations. And if I am in the same mind then, it is easy enough to carry out my plans.’

‘If you are in the same mind then. Oh, Frederick, how you make my heart ache by those words. How do you know

that God will permit you to be in the same mind then?—that He will not have delivered you over to the machinations of the Evil One—that you may not, like Esau, fail to find repentance, though you seek it carefully and with tears? My dear cousin, I beg of you to put all such terrible doubts out of your head at once, for they are only temptations sent to try your faith. Have you not read that often, when dying Christians are at their last gasp, Satan is permitted to try them, by implanting blasphemous doubts in their minds of the truth of God or Christ's salvation. It is so with you. You have been allowed to reach, as it were, the very gates of Heaven, and the devil attempts to drag you thence. Resist him by every means in your power, Frederick! Stamp these unnatural doubts under foot, and think only of the great good before you, and the few steps left to gain it.'

Still Frederick was unconvinced.

‘It will not be good if I find I am unable to perform the duties required of

me, conscientiously and with my whole heart. Philip, this is not a new fear with me. I have experienced it often during the last few months, and I cannot believe but that it is sent as a warning. I have tried hard to keep such thoughts out of my head, but it is impossible. When I sleep, I dream of the world, of the scenes I used to mix in, the amusements I engaged in, the people I associated with, and I wake, feverish, excited, and anxious to see them all again. What feelings are these with which to enter the Church ?'

'All temptations, diabolical temptations,' said Philip, with a look of distress.

'But I cannot help them, they are unavoidable,' replied his cousin, 'and if they continue when I am a priest, what shall I do ?'

'Have you any doubt? Do as I have told you; stamp on them as you would on the head of the Old Serpent himself. Frederick! beware how you give way to such fancies. You have been plucked as

a brand from the burning. You have consecrated your life to the service of our Church—your prayers to gaining the salvation of your young wife, who was hurled into Eternity without a care for her soul—and, at your peril, renounce these sacred objects for a mere dream. What! have you forgotten Jenny so soon, that you no longer desire to work out her salvation by the sacrifice of your own inclinations. Have you lost the wish to meet her again, purified from the sins which bound you together, and free to enjoy Heaven in each other's company.'

'Oh! no! no! my poor darling, never!' cried Frederick, in a burst of remorse.

'You will forfeit it all, if you do not fight against this horrible snare,' replied Philip, sternly. 'I knew that such doubts were likely to oppress you, Frederick, but I little thought to find you so weak in dispelling them. Do you suppose that any priests are entirely free from such feelings—that each one is not obliged at times to wrestle with the earthly part of

his nature, and kill the old man within him? But where would be their crown of glory, without their cross to carry? Is it to be earned for nothing? Are the angels to record no deeds of valour on the roll of the martyrs' names, to counteract the dark plots which might otherwise efface them? If you imagined the road you elected to travel was one of roses, I am sorry for you. I thought you had more sense.'

'Yes! yes! you are right. I see I have been very weak,' said Frederick, as he sat upright and assumed a more cheerful aspect. 'It was a devilish temptation, as you say, Philip! The fact is, I had been talking with an old friend this morning, and it brought the past back a little too vividly. The dark cloud has passed again, and I feel braver. Please don't think of it any more.'

But Philip Walcheren did think of it. He made inquiries, before he left the college, as to what visitors his cousin had received, and heard that a young woman had been closeted with him for nearly

an hour in the early part of the day. So he went straight to Father Tasker with the story, the result of which was that the priest also paid Frederick a visit, and had a long conversation with him upon the subject. Philip had told him that his cousin showed such signs of wavering that, if he were allowed to converse with many more young women, or to renew his old worldly associations, there were grave doubts if he might not give up the idea of being a priest altogether. And that meant, in the estimation of them both, not only the loss of his fortune for the Church, but the loss of himself for heaven.

So the father used his utmost casuistry to persuade the novice that the feelings he complained of were only so many signs of God's interest in him, and that it was because He loved His son so much that He permitted him to be chastised by doubts and perplexities. He ran over the old gauntlet of Jenny's peril in purgatory; of her present sufferings,

which Frederick would augment tenfold by any defalcation ; of his promises to offer the Mass daily for her relief, and of the probability that if he drew back, after he had put his hand to the plough, *she* would be the innocent victim of his defalcation.

He raked up the old wound, now gradually closing, till it streamed with blood ; he made his disciple writhe under his scathing reminders ; and, finally, he made him look so mean in his own eyes, that the young man was fairly baited into retracting all he had said to his cousin, and declaring he had never had any intention of giving up the Church, or going back from his plighted word. The priest, however, was not satisfied, and sought an early interview with his Superior, during which they decided that, for the good of the Church, and this poor, wavering soul, Frederick Walcheren's ordination had better take place as soon as possible, for which purpose several letters passed between them and higher authorities, and the day for the ceremony was

fixed for a much earlier date than had been at first intended.

Meantime, Frederick was silenced, but not convinced. Had he been less sick of the world and its gaieties at the time—had his nerves not been so unstrung from the shock they had received—he would not have given in a second time so easily, but he was too tired (mentally) to argue the point. It was less trouble to say ‘Yes,’ than to keep on repeating ‘No,’ and he really did not seem to care which way it turned out ; so he yielded with a sigh, and tried to persuade himself that it was of no consequence—that nothing would be of any consequence to him evermore.

But though he returned to his studies, he could not fix his attention on them as heretofore, for the face of Rhoda Berry would come between him and the written page. He feared he had spoken unkindly and roughly to her, and, if so, he was a brute. The poor girl had never harmed him ; the wrong had been all on the other side. He had never been really attached

to her, but he had been fond of her during the days of their courtship, and he could remember that he had regretted the fact of her birth precluding the idea of his asking her to be his wife.

He could remember also that he thought her a very intelligent and well-read girl, and a most interesting companion, more interesting, perhaps, and sensible than his sweet Jenny, who needed nothing but her own beauty to make all men worship her. Rhoda was a pretty girl too, not quite in his style, perhaps, for how could he admire blue eyes and yellow hair, with Jenny's big hazel orbs and chestnut locks forever before his mental vision? Still—whatever Rhoda was like, he had deeply wronged her, and she had never even reproached him for his baseness—never hinted that he had behaved badly to her, or that he ought to be ashamed of himself for deserting her and her child, in order to marry another woman. It was awfully good of her. Almost angelic, and he could weep tears of blood when he thought of it. He said one

or two long prayers on her behalf, and then returned to his books, and tried to banish her from his mind.

But it was in vain! Strive as hard as Frederick would to fix his thoughts on Saint Augustine, or Saint Chrysostom, or any other of the holy fathers of the Church, their revered memories had to give way to a pair of tearful blue eyes and a willowy figure bearing a little image of himself in its arms.

He felt that he could settle to nothing until he had made peace with his conscience by making such amends as lay in his power for the grievous wrong he had done poor Rhoda Berry.

‘Hang it all!’ he said to himself, after a most unclerical fashion, ‘I must make some provision for that child, whether Rhoda likes it or not. I can’t make up my mind to give thousands to a Church, who is as rich as old Crœsus, whilst I leave my own flesh and blood unprovided for. But she never even told me the little beggar’s name, and, if I write to her for it,

she will refuse again to take the money. Well! I can settle it on her instead. I must see Mr Sinclair on the subject at once!'

This resolution, on his part, resulted in his sending a request to his solicitor to call on him as soon as convenient, when he received him in his private room.

'I have asked to see you, Mr Sinclair,' he commenced, 'in order to place a confidence in you. You are aware, I believe, that, in a very short time, I am to be admitted to Holy Orders, and that, when that happens, my money, of which you have hitherto had the charge, will be confiscated to the Church.'

'I have heard so, Mr Walcheren, and, frankly, I was very sorry to hear it.'

'Ah, well, never mind that. It is all settled, so the less said soonest mended. But, before the deeds are drawn up in favour of the Church, I wish to make the disposition of a small portion of my property to an old friend. I conclude I am at perfect liberty to do so?'

'Most certainly, Mr Walcheren; you

can give, or will, the whole of it away, if you like. The money was left absolutely to you for your own use. Pray, don't be persuaded into thinking that you are in any way, morally or legally, bound to give it to the Church.'

'No, no, I am aware of that. I make it over of my own free will. Only, I should like to make this little provision first. What does my income really amount to, Mr Sinclair? I have been such a careless dog, that I never made myself master of the amount.'

'You have the estate of Tetley, in Shropshire, you know, Mr Walcheren, which brings in about five hundred a year, and forty thousand pounds in consols, and from fifteen to twenty thousand in scrip. It's a tidy little fortune, and might be greatly increased by judicious handling. I'm truly sorry to find you throwing it away.'

'Hush! hush! man, what would the reverend fathers think if they heard you speak of increasing the revenues of the Church by such a term? And it will be all

one, you know, when I am ordained. What good will money be to me then? I shouldn't be allowed to spend it if I had it.'

'True, but is it quite impossible that you may not yet change your mind?'

'Quite so; but let us keep to the matter in hand. I need not tell you, Mr Sinclair, who have known me through my "green sallet" days, that I have been a bit wild at times, and, amongst other peccadilloes, I deeply wronged a young friend of mine, named Rhoda Berry. In fact, she—she—has a little child of mine, and it is this child I am desirous of providing for, but the mother has refused to take any money from me. Cannot it be settled on her without any consent on her part?'

'Most certainly! any amount you like, provided you are in possession of the young woman's full name.'

'Yes! Her only names are Rhoda Berry, and she lives with her mother at Elm Cottage, Harrow Lane, Luton.'

'Very good,' replied the solicitor, as

he noted down the information, 'And the amount to be settled ?'

'Five thousand pounds,' replied Frederick, promptly.

'That's a large sum, Mr Walcheren, for a case like this. It means a couple of hundred a year, remember.'

'And which do you suppose wants it most; this poor girl, who is thrown probably on her own resources for life, with a child to keep into the bargain, and all through my beastly selfishness, or the Catholic Church, who has thousands of benefactors, and is rich in every sort of treasure ?'

'Oh ! I am not blaming you,' replied Mr Sinclair, who, being a Protestant, would rather have seen the money thrown into the gutter than go to enrich the coffers of the Roman Chnrch. 'I think you are quite right, and doing most handsomely by the young lady — most handsomely indeed !'

'No money can make amends for sin,' said Frederick, sententiously.

‘And how is this sum to be settled on Miss Berry, Mr Walcheren?’ demanded the solicitor. ‘In trust for the child, or unconditionally on herself?’

‘Unconditionally on herself, please. I know, if she uses it at all, it will be for the benefit of the boy. Keep a note of my directions, Mr Sinclair, but don’t draw up the deed until you do the two together. There will be less chance then, I think, of my being bothered from either side. When you draw the five thousand pounds, take it from the sum in consols. There will be the less chance of its being missed. Oh, dear! how glad I shall be when all this worry is over, and matters settled for good and all!’

‘Am I to draw out this sum, and re-invest it in Miss Berry’s name?’

‘No, put it back in consols. It is a lower rate of interest than Rhoda could get elsewhere, but it is safer; and women are idiots about money matters. When you write and tell her about my

present, perhaps you will advise her not to take it out on the chance of getting more interest. And, Sinclair, I wish you to have five hundred pounds, over and above what I may owe you.'

'I couldn't think of taking such a sum, Mr Walcheren. It is far too much.'

'Nonsense! You were a good friend to me when I was knocking about town, and got me out of many a scrape, and I know no one whom I would rather give it to. Why, what's the odds to me? I sha'n't have a halfpenny in my own hands in a fortnight's time. Why shouldn't I have the pleasure of making my old friends a little present whilst I can.'

'You're very good, Mr Walcheren, and I don't say that the sum will not give me pleasure, and be very useful to me; but, believe me, when I add that I would rather, a thousand times over, see it in your own hands. This step you contemplate makes me very uneasy. It seems so unnatural—so sudden!'

‘It is sudden, Sinclair, but not unnatural. In losing my beloved wife, I have lost everything, and I don’t care what becomes of the rest of my life. The vocation I am about to adopt is the one chosen for me by my mother, and I am only following her express wishes by entering the Church. It appears unnatural to you, because you have never known me, except as a wild, devil-may-care fellow, up to any pranks, and utterly careless all round. But you don’t know the complete difference a shock, like the one I have experienced, makes in a man. It opens his eyes in a moment, as it were, to the folly and wickedness of his past life, and makes him see that there is only one thing worth living and striving for, and that is—the next. Once convinced of that truth, there can be no returning to the past existence. It fades away like a dream, and nothing can content one in the future, but hard, solid, substantial work.’

‘Very true, Mr Walcheren. I suppose that time comes to every man after a

certain period of carelessness. You remember the old song, sir, "Each dog must have his day." And when the best part of the day is over, we all feel, if we have any sense, that it is time to give up play. But you can work whilst you remain in the world, Mr Walcheren, and set a good example to your neighbours, into the bargain.'

The same axiom that Rhoda had hurled at his head, though clothed in other words. Frederick recognised it at once, and the recognition made him assume a colder air towards the solicitor.

'No doubt, Mr Sinclair,' he responded, 'no doubt, but we all have different tastes, and the Church is mine. I am afraid I shall have to dismiss you now, as the time is getting on for refectory, and I have some preparations to make before the bell sounds. You will bear all my instructions in mind, I am sure. Good morning!'

'Good morning! Mr Walcheren. I cannot thank you enough for your kind

intentions respecting myself, for which you know that I should receive your instructions in writing. And if I have, in my sincere regard and friendship for you, said more than I should, I hope you will forgive me. I had not the least intention to offend.'

'I am sure of that, Sinclair, but there are things that will not bear talking of. I am fairly sick of life, my dear old friend —terribly sick and tired of it, and one lot is quite as good as another in my eyes. My greatest wish is that it may all be over as quickly as possible, and I may join my darling girl again.'

He held out his hand to his companion as he spoke, and as Mr Sinclair's eyes met the careworn, haggard face of the young man, whom he remembered as one of the handsomest, most *débonnaire* fellows about town, they became so moist that he could hardly see, and, grasping the hand offered him firmly, he quickly left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE whole talk of the employés in the firm of Messrs Hindes & Son, late Hindes & Crampton, was of the extraordinary change that had taken place in their employer. Clerks, whether they be head or under clerks, are shy, as a rule, of whispering anything so derogatory to the head of their firm, as the suspicion that he takes 'more than is good for him.' But there was really no other possible reason to be adduced for the condition in which Henry Hindes constantly presented himself in the office. Formerly, he had been a keen, vigorous, active man of business, always ready to detect an error in the accounts, or to make a good bargain for himself and

his partner. But, since Mr Crampton's death, he seemed as if he had lost all his capacity. Vendors, bearing samples of their wares, walked in and out of the counting-house, shaking their heads over Mr Hindes' altered condition, and wondering what had become of the powerful brain and courteous manners, to which they had been accustomed for so long. The cashier declared he might as well take in his books to be checked by a child, for all the attention the 'governor' accorded them, and the younger clerks affirmed that, when they carried a message to the inner office, they had to shout at him, sometimes three or four times, before he seemed to hear them, or understand what they were saying. Had he gone deaf, they inquired amongst themselves, or was he growing stupid? He seemed to be always more or less asleep, and when roused to take an active part in the affairs of the firm, was not always as good-tempered as he might be. One lad had given him notice

because, he said, he could not stand Mr Hindes' bullying any longer, and this was the more remarkable, because the senior partner had ever been distinguished for his urbanity, and soft-spoken ways with all the younger members of the firm. But his office companions were on Alfred Jones' side, for the change in Henry Hindes was too remarkable to be denied. He, who had been noted for being so well dressed and perfectly appointed, who was wont to come each morning to town in a suit of the latest fashion, with a flower in his button-hole, and his white hands carefully encased in well-fitting gloves—would now lounge in at all hours, sometimes disgracefully late, in a shooting-coat or a rough suit of tweed, with sleepy eyes and careless hair, looking as if he had just tumbled out of his bed. His manner, which had had the credit of being so polite, even when under the necessity of telling an unpleasant truth, that even strangers were warned, before they set foot in the

office to ask, for the senior partner had become curt, irritable, and sometimes exceedingly rude, so that intending customers went away offended, and never showed their faces there again. Mr Bloxam, who had been cashier to the firm for forty years past, and known Henry Hindes from his cradle, used to shake his head, and say that the business was fast going to the devil, and the sooner they put the shutters up, the better. The younger men whispered and made jokes amongst themselves, and hinted that 'Old Harry' (as he was familiarly termed amongst his employés) had been looking at the outside of a whisky bottle, and things would go on much better if he would stay at home and leave them to manage the business.

But these comments, naturally, never reached the ears of the man they pointed at. The unfortunate 'governor' still continued to attend the office and furnish jokes for the lads under him. He was little aware of how well he deserved

them. His gait had now become slouching and he trembled as he walked. His hands shook so, that it was with difficulty he could sign his name intelligibly, and, more than once, the manager of the bank he lodged his money with, had sent over to identify his signature, it was so unlike what it used to be. He always seemed to be asleep, or nearly so. He would rouse himself with a start when spoken to, and then curse the intruder for having addressed him in so low a tone. More than one youth followed Jones out of the office, because Hindes declared he mumbled on purpose to annoy him, and he threw a heavy book at the head of a third, because, on having failed to make his master hear, he rang a hand-bell which stood at his elbow.

The office, where all had been conducted so pleasantly, was now the scene of continual quarrelling, and Henry Hindes bid fair to be left alone in his glory.

The man's whole appearance had

changed. His clear, keen eyes were bloodshot and dropsical looking—his nails were permitted to grow, and the skin about them to become irregular—he often appeared with an unshaven chin, and a limp collar. Mr Bloxam was the only person in the office he ever spoke to, and him he took, curiously, into his confidence, playing uncertain notes on him, as on an instrument of which he was not quite sure, but from which he longed to extract harmony.

There was a case occupying the attention of the papers just then, in which Mr Hindes seemed to take an unusual interest. A man had given himself up to justice for having committed a murder twenty years before, and the persons, who might have borne witness against him, being dead, he had provided all the necessary information himself, even taking the police to the spot where he had committed the crime, and making them disinter the dust and bones that remained of his victim. The reason the

case attracted particular attention was on account of the length of time that had elapsed since the murder, and also that the murderer had been very prosperous and esteemed since, occupied a good position in society—and had a wife and family to be plunged into disgrace by his confession.

‘I can’t understand the motive of Rayner’s confession, Bloxam,’ Henry Hindes would observe confidentially to his cashier. ‘It would never have been found out to the day of his death, and what good does the disclosure effect? Here is a respectable tradesman, with a wife and family dependent on him—respected by his friends and customers—rich and flourishing in his trade—and he throws it all away for the sake of confessing his participation in a crime which the world has forgotten ages ago, and which he cannot rectify, even by swinging on the gallows.’

‘That is true, sir,’ replied Mr Bloxam, ‘but you don’t take into consideration

that Rayner's conscience would not, in all probability, let him keep silence any longer. A murder must lie pretty heavy on a man's soul, Mr Hindes. I don't suppose he has had much rest at night, poor creature, however much he may have prospered outwardly. And he is an old man too—sixty the papers say—and begins to think, no doubt, of meeting his Maker, face to face, with that sin unconfessed. My wonder is how he has managed to live through so many years with such a burthen on his conscience. He must have led a terrible life !'

Hindes' face grew very yellow during this exordium, but the subject fascinated him, as fire is said to fascinate some people, and a precipice others, until they can hardly resist the temptation to cast themselves down headlong.

' But why should a murder, dreadful as it is, lie so much heavier on a man's conscience than his other sins? Look! how many murders are committed by most of us! We strike a blow, perhaps, which

might have killed a fellow. If it had, we should have been arraigned as a murderer ; since it does not, we go scot-free. But the feeling of murder was there all the same. We are just as guilty in the sight of Heaven. Why should we vex ourselves about one sin more than the other ?'

'I'm not fit to argue the point with you, Mr Henry,' answered the cashier, 'but there's surely a difference ! We don't always mean to murder a friend when we hit him. If we *do* kill him, even by accident, we have to pay the penalty. But when a man deliberately injures another, knowing it *must* kill him, like this Rayner, who strikes a fellow creature on the head with a hammer—why, that was deliberate murder—he *meant* to kill Thompson, and he must be a thorough bad man to have kept the secret in his breast for twenty years. Hanging's too good for him ; that's what everybody says.'

'But telling won't bring Thompson back again, that's my argument,' said Henry Hindes, sullenly. 'Rayner hangs himself

by his confession, and does no one any good.'

'Except himself, sir! He'll save his own soul, maybe, by the expiation of his crime, however tardy. See! what a hypocritical life he must have been leading. Mixing with all sorts of people, who would have spurned him with their feet had they known his real character—kissing his innocent children and wife—setting up for a respectable member of society, when he's the lowest creature amongst them all. The deceit has been too much for him at last, Mr Hindes, and he feels now, doubtless, that he would rather be standing on the gallows platform, as an honest man, than keep his place and go on deceiving. Why, he must have been thoroughly miserable. No one could enjoy life, however wealthy, under such circumstances. It must have been nothing but a burden to him.'

Henry Hindes sat for a few minutes musing silently. Bloxam, thinking the interview was over, prepared to leave the office

‘Don’t go, Bloxam,’ exclaimed his employer, rousing himself. ‘Stay a little longer. This subject interests me. I feel so much for this poor fellow. I wonder if he is in his right mind.’

‘Oh! yes, sir, there’s no doubt of that! Why, he remembers everything connected with the murder, as if it happened yesterday. He described the whole scene to the officers with the minutest details, such as a lock of poor Thompson’s hair getting stuck on the hammer with the blood, and his holding the hammer in the flame of the candle afterwards till it was completely cleansed. He could tell exactly what the poor fellow wore, and mentioned a gold ring he had on his little finger. And when they found the bones and dust under the cellar flooring, there was the ring amongst them, just as he said.’

‘Yes; I read that. But wouldn’t it have been wiser and better of Rayner to have kept this secret to the end, for the sake of his wife and children? He had kept it so long, you see; and, as I said

before, confession could not remedy the evil he had done.'

'No, sir; but we are not sure, you see, that he *had* entirely kept the secret to himself. He has a wife, and women are powerfully 'cute about such matters. Married men don't keep secrets long. I can say that on my own authority. I know I shouldn't care to have one that Mrs Bloxam wasn't to find out. Perhaps Rayner's wife got at his, and had threatened him with discovery. It isn't unlikely, and then he had better be beforehand with her.'

At this proposition, Hindes went positively grey.

'But—but—' he stammered, 'I thought, Bloxam—I always have been told that the evidence of a wife cannot be taken against her husband in a court of law.'

'I've heard the same, sir; but, bless you, if a woman once got hold of a secret like that, she'd have a hundred ways of bringing the walls of a man's

house about his ears, without meaning it. Women can't help gossiping. It's their nature; and if a thing of that sort once gets repeated, the police would soon get hold of it. I wouldn't trust my neck to Mrs Bloxam's tender mercies; I know that, though she's a good woman, and fond of me in her way; but news leaks through women. There's no other name for it. It leaks through them.'

'Do you think so?' asked Hindes, with a shiver.

'I'm sure of it, sir. Many a woman has been murdered for gossiping alone. They taunt the men with the things they may have done, and threaten to expose them, till they aggravate them into kicking or beating them to death. Half the cases of manslaughter come through women's taunts. They're not generous, as a rule.'

'Don't you think,' said Hindes, putting a suppositious case, 'that it would have been much wiser for Rayner to have gone out to the States or Australia, and

have commenced a new life there under another name? He appears to have plenty of money. I think, instead of making confession, that I would sooner leave my wife and children comfortable, and fly the country, pretend to be lost overboard, or to die on reaching my haven—lose myself to the world, in fact, and begin life over anew. I am sure that if I did that—'

‘You—you—if *you* did that, Mr Henry!’ exclaimed Mr Bloxam, in a voice of surprise.

Henry Hindes, recalled to the trip his tongue had made, changed countenance to a kind of dull red purplish hue.

‘I—I—’ he stammered, ‘did I say *I*? I must have been dreaming! We were talking of poor Rayner, surely. Why didn’t he take a sum of money and go away and make a new name for himself in a new country? Did you suppose that I was talking of myself, Bloxam? Why should I say such things of myself? Do I look as if I had committed a—a—the

thing that Rayner did?' And he finished up his sentence with a feeble, cackling laugh.

'God forbid! Mr Henry,' responded the cashier, solemnly. 'I knew, of course, you were speaking of that unhappy man! Why shouldn't he have fled the country instead, sir? Why, because it would have been of no use. Wherever he went he couldn't have left his conscience behind him, and, once that was awakened, he would have had to confess his guilt, whether he found himself in England or Australia. He might have run away from his wife and children, Mr Hindes, but he couldn't have run away from his crime. That would have followed him anywhere, even to the ends of the earth. Poor wretch! I pity him from the bottom of my heart. He'd better by far have given himself up to justice at once. Fancy the life he must have been living for the last twenty years, lying down and getting up, with the ghost of his poor murdered victim always by his side, look-

ing at him with his reproachful eyes, and asking him silently what right he had to be eating and drinking and making merry, whilst he lay in his unhallowed grave! But it was bound to come out at last, sir. Murder always does.'

'Always! Does it always, Bloxam?' demanded his employer, fearfully. 'Do you mean to say that *no* murders have ever been successfully concealed?'

'Very few, sir, if any. They lie too heavy on the conscience for that. Why, isn't Rayner a case in point? If any have been kept dark for ever it must be amongst Roman Catholics, for they can ease their consciences by confession, and, if they receive absolution, they are set at rest. They have such entire faith in the power of their priests to absolve them from their sins. I have a friend of that religion, and its wonderful how bright he seems after he's been to confession, quite a different creature.'

'But if a man were to confess a murder in the confessional, the priest would give

him up to justice, surely?' said Henry Hindes.

'Oh, no, he wouldn't, begging your pardon. My friend tells me that the secrets of the confessional are inviolate. No priest would dare reveal them, on penalty of being stripped of his cloth. What he hears there never passes his lips again, not even to another priest.'

'I shouldn't like to trust him, all the same,' said Hindes; 'human nature is subject to too many accidents. A priest might lose his brain and babble everything he had heard.'

'I fancy, Mr Henry,' replied Bloxam, laughing, 'that he hears so many things, good, bad, and indifferent, that he forgets them as soon as he has heard them. And he doesn't know the names of half his penitents. A Catholic may go to any confessor he likes. It is his director only that he does not change.'

'You seem to know a lot about it,' said Hindes, indifferently.

'Only what my friend tells me, sir,'

replied the cashier; 'but Catholics seem to derive so much consolation from confession, that I often wonder the practice is not more largely used in other churches. Will you see the books now, Mr Henry?'

'No, not now,' replied Hindes, in a languid voice; 'I'm awfully tired.'

'But you did not see them last week, sir, and, if you'll excuse my saying so, it is too long to let them run on without casting an eye over them.'

'Oh, they're sure to be all right, Bloxam. I can trust you better than myself.'

'I hope you may trust me, Mr Henry, after forty years' service with your honoured father and yourself, but still it would be a satisfaction if you would look into matters a little more closely than you have done of late. You're not yourself, sir, if you'll forgive my saying so, since poor Mr Crampton's death.'

Hindes roused himself directly, and, sitting upright in his chair, pulled the ledger towards him.

‘*Why*, since Mr Crampton’s death, Bloxam,’ he said irritably, ‘I’ve had plenty of time to get over that. But I’m not well, I haven’t been for months, and I ought to go away—go away,’ he continued, muttering to himself. ‘Now, what’s the matter with these confounded ledgers?’

He stuck his fingers through his hair, and stared in a vague way at the rows of figures before him.

‘There’s nothing the matter, sir, I trust,’ replied the cashier; ‘I can detect no error in them, but here are the bills of lading and the accounts of sale, for you to compare with the entries. Macintosh & Prome of Antwerp sent us five hundred bales of the December order, but, in consequence of a fire taking place on the wharf, they were unable to complete the order—’

‘Oh, hang it, man, take the beastly things back, do,’ cried Hindes, pushing the books across the table, ‘and look into them yourself. I’m not well enough

My eyesight has failed terribly of late, and the long rows of figures dazzle me. I trust it all to you—all to you. Do as you think best, but don't worry me about it! I'm going home!'

And, reaching down his hat and coat, Mr Hindes stumbled out of his office, followed by the winking eyes of the clerks, who, with their tongues stuck in their cheeks, whispered to each other that the governor had, 'got 'em again.' But poor old Bloxam returned to his desk, shaking his head, and repeating that the business was going to the devil.

CHAPTER X.

HENRY HINDES reached Hampstead quite early in the afternoon, and his wife met him with a foreign letter in her hand.

Hannah was much changed by this time as well as himself. Always quiet and refined, her manner had settled down into a general melancholy. She tried to smile sometimes, and to look cheerful for the sake of her little Wally, whom it was sad to think should be brought up between such a father and mother, but the attempt was usually abortive. How could she smile, whilst memory remained to her? But she never mentioned the terrible secret between them to her husband. Only he could see, but too plainly by the ex-

pression of her eyes, that she never forgot it, and it made him nervous and uneasy in her presence. They had been as happy as most husbands and wives before, and much happier than some; but though Hannah clung to him through a sense of duty, she shuddered if he touched her, or attempted to caress her, and Henry Hindes saw it. The little girls, too, being banished from home, made a great difference in 'The Old Hall.' Elsie and Laurie never came back, even for the holidays, though their mother saw them frequently, and their father dared not ask to see them. Wally, too, was confined to the nursery whenever he was indoors, and if he wanted to see him, it was almost by stealth he was obliged to accomplish it. So the house, which once had rung with childish laughter, was very much changed, as well as everybody in it; and the servants, though not admitted to their employer's confidence, saw and heard enough to make them participators in

the fact, that something very unpleasant had come between the master and the mistress. But, on that particular day, as Hannah met him with the foreign letter in her hand, she tried to assume one of her old smiles, and to welcome her husband cheerfully.

‘Here is a letter from Arthur, Henry,’ she said; ‘it came by the twelve o’clock post, just after you had driven away this morning.’

She held out a large, thin envelope to him as she spoke, and with a species of grunt, which was the usual salutation Henry Hindes accorded her, he took the letter and tore it open. The contents did not appear to please him.

‘Here’s a pretty kettle of fish,’ he exclaimed; ‘the doctors out there say that Edith must not pass another hot season in Bombay, so Arthur has applied for furlough, and they are all coming home as soon as they can pack up their traps.’

This announcement took Hannah completely by surprise. Captain Arthur

Hindes was her husband's younger and only brother, indeed, his only near relation, who had married a very nice girl from their house some seven years before, and taken her out to Bombay, where they had a family of five children. They had visited England once during that period, when they had resided for a year at 'The Old Hall,' and now they were coming home again, and expected evidently to do the same thing—*now*, when they least expected them—least needed them.

'Coming back so soon,' she faltered. 'Why! in one of her last letters, Edith said they were bound to remain in Bombay for at least three years more. Why doesn't Arthur send her to the hills instead? Does he mention it as a settled thing?'

'If you don't believe me, read for yourself and see!' replied her husband, as he tossed the letter across the table. Hannah picked it up, and read,—

'DEAR HARRY,—You'll be surprised, but I hope not sorry, to hear that we

are all on the hop for home again. Edith has had a nasty attack lately—uncommonly like cholera—and it has left her so weak, that the doctor says I must not keep her in Bombay another hot season. We thought of the Hills at first, but he so strongly recommends England, that I have applied for my long leave, and, as all our fellows are here, have no doubt that I shall get it. I think, after all, it is just as well we should make a move. Fanny and Hal have grown so tall and thin that they look more as if they had been run up through gas-pipes than ever; and the last addition has suffered terribly with its teething, so we shall be none the worse for seeing dear old England again. We shall be there three years, so as to settle the elder chicks at school before we return to India. How I am longing to see The Old Hall again, and your lovely garden. It will be in its spring dress by the time we arrive. I hope the son and heir is flourishing, and not grown too proud to

acknowledge his poor relations under his accession to the fortune that has come to him. There are only six months between him and my little Charlie. They will be nice playmates. What a jolly old fellow Mr Crampton must have been. How you must regret his loss! Our best love to Hannah and the girls. You may expect to see us home about the middle of April, or beginning of May. Good-bye, old chappie.—Ever your affectionate brother,

ARTHUR HINDES.'

Hannah read the letter through in silence, and laid it down.

‘Well!’ ejaculated her husband, ‘you see they are coming, and mean to share The Old Hall with us, as they did last time. Let me see! How long is it since they were in England? Three years, isn’t it—or nearly so? And a couple more youngsters in that time. Artie will have his hands full before he has done.’

Still she was silent.

‘What’s the row now?’ demanded Hindes. ‘Are you going to set your back up against their coming here? There’s plenty of room; all the more now the girls have gone to school. The children can have the whole of the top floor. They need not inconvenience you.’

‘Henry,’ said his wife, slowly, ‘they cannot come here!’

‘Cannot come here,’ he repeated, redenying. ‘What do you mean? Is the house yours or mine? It’s a pretty thing when you commence to shut my doors against my own relations. But they expect to come here, and they must.’

‘They cannot come here,’ repeated Hannah, decidedly.

‘Why not?’ said Hindes, boldly.

She lifted her eyes and looked him full in the face.

‘Oh, you’re *there*, are you?’ he exclaimed, dropping his own. ‘You want to make what you learnt by your eaves-dropping public property. You will prevent my brother entering my house, and

make him curious to learn the reason; cause a quarrel between us, and drive me into a corner until I let the cat out of the bag. That's your object, is it? A neat way to get rid of me altogether.'

'I want none of these things, Henry,' she replied; 'but you must act honestly in this matter. You must not let your brother and his wife and children do anything for which they may reproach you in after years. You must think of an excuse to keep them away. They shall not take up their residence here, to be brought in hourly contact with—to be contaminated by association with—with—'

'Say it out at once,' retorted Hindes, angrily. 'Let all the world know what you know. Run up to the house-top and bawl it out from the roof, that all Hampstead may hear the story of your devotion to me. Why don't you ring the bell and assemble the servants and tell them what a master they are serving—a man who is not to be trusted with his own children, nor to associate with his brother. You've

been itching to do it ever since that accursed night. You women can never keep a secret. I might have been prepared for that from the beginning. But mark my words, madam, the first moment you hint at such a thing, you go out of my house, and never see your children more. They're *my* children, and I will submit to no more of your tantrums concerning them. You only say these things to try and show your power over me. But, after all, what power have you? Where are your witnesses? A man cannot be convicted on the testimony of a nightmare. It *was* a nightmare! All these silent accusations of yours are the outcome of your own vivid imagination. You have no more power over me than *that*,' snapping his fingers in her face, 'and I defy you to injure me—I defy you.'

He sank down exhausted in a chair after this outbreak, and shook like an aspen. The habits he had contracted had robbed him of all physical and moral

courage. Hannah stood for a few moments in silence, until he was in a fitter state to listen to her, and then she said,—

‘ It is true that, legally speaking, I may have no power over you, nor would I wield it if I had. But, if you show so little sorrow for what I know to be a fact, so little consideration for Arthur and his family, I will not stay in The Old Hall to be a partaker in it. If you cannot, or will not, devise some plan by which you can induce your brother to take up his quarters elsewhere, I shall leave you to entertain them by yourself. I shall go back to my mother, and take my children with me. The law still permits me the custody of two of them, but, if you attempt to touch any one of the three, I will appeal to its protection, and tell all I know in extenuation of my conduct. You must accept this, Henry, as my ultimatum. I will *not* remain here to receive your brother’s family.’

Was it possible that this was Hannah

—Hannah, who was renowned for her gentleness and meekness and docility. Her face did not flush as she spoke, nor did she show any signs of anger, but she stood facing her husband, calm and pale, but perfectly decided. Guilt had made a coward of him, and he turned from her shuddering, and hid his face in the sofa cushion.

‘You want to ruin me!’ he murmured.

‘No, Henry, no. I want to make you regard your past in its true light, and to make what amends for it you can. What if this terrible secret should ever come out? Do you wish to involve others in your disgrace? Would you rather be quoted as having led the life of a hypocrite, or that of a penitent man?’

‘Come out—come out,’ he echoed, ‘how can it come out, unless you betray me?’

‘You need not be afraid of that, but God has His own ways of working. If it is His will to reveal it, no efforts of ours will prevent it. But the more persons you have in the house, the more risk you run.

Who can answer for what servants and children overhear? You are so strange sometimes, even in the middle of the day, that I hardly know what to think of you. You do not seem like yourself, or as if you had your proper senses. You ramble at such times, and are not safe. I am protecting instead of betraying you, by advising you not to let Arthur bring his family to The Old Hall.'

A grey shade passed over Hindes' features.

'Do I talk much?' he inquired fearfully. 'Do I talk of *her*? What do you do at such times, Hannah? How do you keep the servants out?'

She crossed the room then to the sofa where he lay, and sitting down beside him, took his head and laid it on her bosom. As he felt the warm touch, he clung to her, as a child clings to its mother in the dark.

'Don't be afraid, dear,' she said softly. 'Neither servants nor friends shall gain access to you at such times. I guard you

too well for that. Should you be down-stairs, I take you to your bedroom; if the fit comes on whilst you are in your own room, I lock the door. Have no fear on that score. I will never leave you whilst you are true to yourself.'

He sunk his face lower and lower in her bosom, and kissed her arm and her shoulder and any part of her that came within his reach.

'Don't leave me, don't leave me,' he murmured, 'my only hope is in you.'

'But, Henry,' said Hannah, thinking this a favourable opportunity for remonstrance, 'are you not taking too much morphia, or brandy, or something, for your health? You must be careful, or you will circumvent the object you have in view.'

'I must take it, Hannah! *I must!* I have such dreadful dreams without it. I cannot sleep, or think, or act. It is my salvation. You mustn't take it from me.'

'No! no! I had no thought of that,

and if you suffer from neuralgia, I do not see how you could go through your daily work without some sort of remedy. Only morphia is dangerous if taken in too large quantities, and you mustn't cloud your active brain, or where will the business be?'

'How I *hate* the business,' he said. 'Hannah, we have more than enough for our need. Couldn't we go away together somewhere; all together, and let me begin a new life? Out in Australia, or New Zealand, in a purer air, you would trust me with the children, wouldn't you? I will be so good, darling, if you would. I will try so hard not to bring any further disgrace upon their name, or yours. But *here* life is killing me. It is so full of bitter memories —bitter associations. Sometimes I feel as if I could cry on these stones of Hampstead to cover me; I feel so desperate. But in a newer air and amidst new scenes, perhaps—if you will let me have the children—I may—forget.'

The tears were running fast down Hannah's cheeks by this time. The man she held in her arms was no longer the one she had feared and shrunk from, and almost loathed in her contempt, for months past, but the lover of her girlhood—the husband of her youth—the father of her children—and her heart went out with a mighty compassion towards him, notwithstanding his weakness and his sin.

‘Would you come with me?’ he whispered in her ear. ‘Would you try to forget everything, but that once we loved each other very dearly?’

‘Yes! yes! I would,’ she answered, as she kissed his forehead. ‘You are right, Harry. We ought to have thought of it before. We will leave this country together; it is too full of hateful memories for both of us, and see if it will please God to prosper us in another land. How soon can we start, dear? How soon can we be ready? The sooner the better.’

‘It cannot be done in a moment,’ replied Hindes. ‘A business like mine requires time to wind up. But I will put it in hand as soon as possible. Yet on what plea?’

‘Your health, Henry. I am sure it is bad enough for anything. Mr Moreton said yesterday that you looked as if you were in a decline. Heaps of people have commented on your looks before me. I am sure they would accept your state of health as a plea for anything.’

‘But Arthur—Arthur is coming home,’ said Hindes, with the old look of fear.

‘I will manage Arthur’s business for you,’ returned his wife, with decision. ‘I will write to him at once and say that we are very sorry, but the state of your health and nerves is so bad, that we have been obliged to send Elsie and Laura away from home, and you are quite unequal to standing the noise of children about the house. That will be sufficient explanation for everything. And soon, I hope, we shall be far beyond the need of explaining our actions to anybody.’

‘There will be a great deal to do first, you know, Hannah,’ said her husband. “‘The Old Hall’ must be put up for sale, or to let. I wonder what Arthur will say to that?’

‘If you wish to reach the goal you have set before you, Henry,’ replied Hannah; ‘you must cease to think what people will say to your decision. They have no right to say anything, and your anxiety may betray your motive. You have proposed this plan very suddenly. You had better consider it well before you decide. But oh! my dear, if I saw you trying to purify yourself by leading a newer and better life, I should be happier than I ever expected to be in this world.’

‘We must see about it, we must see,’ said Hindes, as he staggered to his feet; ‘but what I am thinking of now is, what Arthur will say.’

She found it useless to try and lead his mind back to the softening mood which had for awhile possessed it, so she let him maulder on in his old style, but took care

to write the letter to her brother-in-law before she retired to rest that night.

Captain Arthur Hindes was very much surprised, and just a little put out, when he received it, which was just as he was on the point of starting for home with his wife and family. It arrived too late to enable him to make any alteration in his plans; but to spend a long furlough in England on his own account, and to live with his brother, paying a complimentary sum towards the housekeeping, were two different things. The Henry Hindes had appeared so pleased to receive them, on the former occasion of their visiting home, and The Old Hall was such a big place, that want of room there could never be an excuse for not taking them in.

'I never was so vexed in my life, Edie,' he observed to his wife, as they read the letter together. 'I had so hoped and expected that the former arrangement would have held good, and Hannah would have taken all the trouble of house-keeping off your hands. You're not in

a fit state to be worried about anything, just now. I feel almost inclined to chuck it all up and go to the hills instead.'

'Oh, no, Arthur, don't do that,' said his wife, who was ready to cry over the disappointment. 'Perhaps Henry will feel better after a while, and able to receive us. You see, you mustn't forget, dear, that we are two more in number since we were in England last, and seven people are really a formidable addition to any household.'

'Nonsense, my dear. The Old Hall contains about twenty bedrooms, and Hannah says their own girls are away. And with their seven or eight servants, what difference should we make, especially as you take your nurses? I'm afraid there is some other reason than the one given. I can't fancy old Hal being nervous, or seedy. He has always been so jolly and hearty and strong. There can't be anything wrong with the business, surely?'

'Oh, no, not likely; but don't you

remember, Artie, that when those poor Cramptons died, Hannah told us that Henry was terribly upset. Perhaps he has not recovered the shock yet.'

'No, my dear, I'm afraid that sentimental explanation won't hold water. Men don't mourn their partner's demise quite so long as all that, particularly when they remember their sons so handsomely in their wills. Let me see. How long has old Crampton been dead, quite nine months, if not more. Hal has had plenty of time to get over that, however much it may have shocked him at the time. He must have worked too hard at the business. That's what shatters men's nerves more than anything.'

'But what shall we do, Arthur, when we get home?' inquired Mrs Hindes.

'That's easily enough settled, dear. I see Hannah offers to look out for a furnished house near them; but it will be best to go a little further off. If we are too near, there will always be a

temptation to run in and out, and that will be more distracting to Henry's nerves, I should imagine, than if we lived there altogether. I shall take you on arrival to a hotel in London, and when we have been there for a few weeks, and seen a few sights, we will get a cottage in the country somewhere, where I can have a little fishing, and you can keep your cocks and hens, and have a pony carriage to drive about the lanes in.'

'Oh, Artie, dear, that will be delightful! I like the idea better than the other. I never had you a moment to myself last time we were in England.'

And thereupon Mrs Arthur embraced her husband so heartily, that it was evident that here, at least, was a happy couple, with no secrets between them.

They reached their native land about the time they had intimated; and the first thing they did, was naturally to go down to Hampstead and see their relatives. It was about nine o'clock one evening that they were suddenly an-

nounced. Hannah was sitting alone in the drawing-room, occupied with needlework, when the footman showed her brother and sister-in-law into her presence. She rose in the utmost confusion, letting her crewels and canvas fall to the ground without noticing it.

‘Edith! Arthur!’ she exclaimed, nervously. ‘Oh, how you have taken me by surprise! I did not think the mail was due till to-morrow, or next day. When did you arrive? Where are you staying? How glad I am to see you.’

But she did not appear glad, to judge from the tremulous sound of her voice.

‘My dear Hannah,’ replied Captain Hindes, ‘Henry might have told you the mail was due this morning. We reached London at noon, and only waited to settle the little ones at a hotel and see their creature comforts attended to before we came on here. We couldn’t wait till to-morrow, you know, to see you and dear old Hal. By the way, where is he? Not out, I hope!’

‘No,’ replied Hannah, in the same timid manner, ‘he is not out. He never goes out of an evening now; but he is in bed. He retired quite an hour ago.’

‘Hal in bed at eight o’clock!’ exclaimed Arthur. ‘Oh, impossible! What’s come to him? I must go and wake him again. I never heard of such a lazy fellow in my life.’

He was about to suit the action to the word, when Hannah stopped him.

‘No, Arthur, please don’t go. You must not wake him, indeed. He sleeps very badly, and is sometimes quite light-headed if roused unexpectedly. I cannot let him be disturbed.’

Captain Hindes sat down with a serious face.

‘So bad as that?’ he said; ‘you quite alarm me, Hannah! Light-headed—what should make him that?’

‘Oh! nothing very serious, if he is only left to himself,’ she answered, trying to smile; ‘Henry suffers from neuralgia, you know, and he often takes morphia to dull

the pain. It always causes a person to ramble and talk nonsense if disturbed.'

'But why does he not consult the doctor for this neuralgia?' asked Arthur. 'My wife has suffered very much from it at times, but it has always yielded to medicine.'

'Henry is not much addicted to doctors, you may remember,' replied Hannah.

'No; he never needed them. I never saw a stronger or healthier man than he used to be. What is he suffering from? What has caused the difference?'

'I don't know,' said Hannah, shaking her head; 'but he has much gone off in strength and appearance lately. You will see a great difference in him when you meet.'

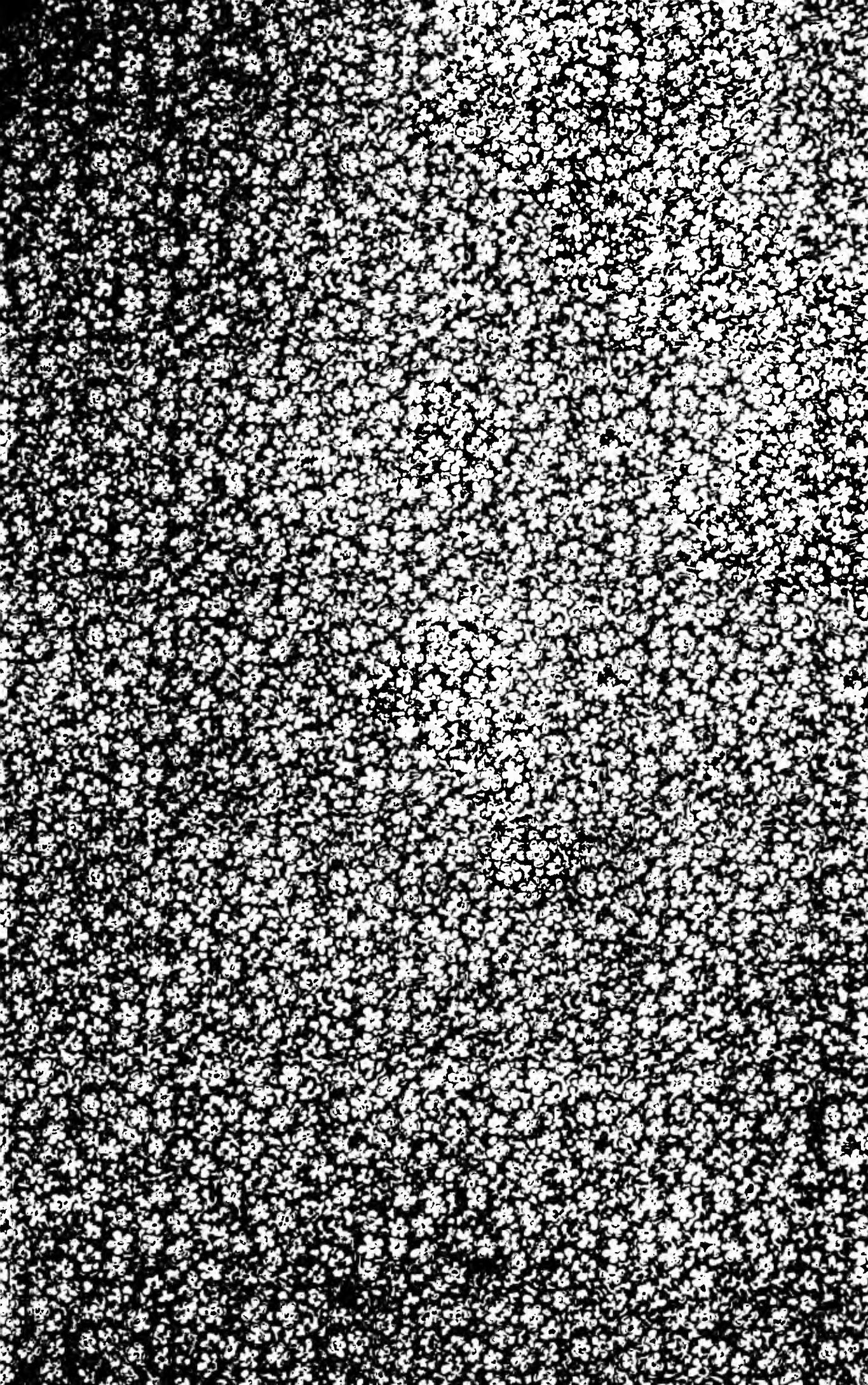
'He's been moping, I suppose, over this Crampton business,' returned Captain Hindes; 'but, now I've come home, I won't let him mope any more. I'll make the old boy come out with me and show me round town. We used to have no

end of larks in the old days. We'll have them again. But now come, Hannah,' he added, taking his sister-in-law's hand, 'just tell me the plain truth. What is the matter with him?'

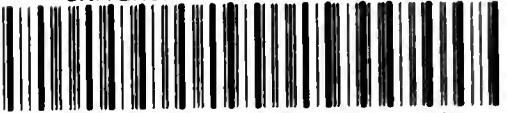
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